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ABSTRACT

A study identified and compared characteristics of enlisted soldiers who participated in postsecondary educational offerings to those who did not and identified barriers to participation for participants and nonparticipants. Individual and focus group interviews were conducted with 92 soldiers at one Army installation. Nonparticipants named these three factors that had the most impact on their motivation to participate in college: interest in subject, to learn a specific skill, and job promotion; participants named these three factors: to obtain a credential, enhance self-efficacy, and prepare for a new career. Nonparticipants named these three factors that had the most impact on their perceived barriers to participation: lack of interest, lack of course offerings, and time constraints; participants indicated three factors: type of unit assignment, unsupportive supervisors, and frequent relocations. Three recommendations were to provide more alternative or nontraditional learning programs for adults who seek licensures and certifications in lieu of traditional postsecondary credentials; amend college and university course transfer policies to be sensitive to this highly mobile subgroup of nontraditional students; and refine the personnel management system so enlisted soldiers with certain military jobs are not relegated solely to tactical assignments, at which educational opportunities are limited. (Appendixes include instruments.) (YLB)

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SOLDIERS PREPARING FOR NEW CAREERS: AN EXAMINATION OF THE MOTIVATIONS AND BARRIERS ASSOCIATED WITH POSTSECONDARY EDUCATIONAL PARTICIPATION OF NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS IN TRANSITION

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by

Clinton Mark Covert

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A Dissertation Presented to the
FACULTY OF THE ROSSIER SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
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ABSTRACT

Understanding factors that influence nontraditional students' motivational orientations and perceived barriers toward postsecondary education remains incomplete. This study focused on identifying the variables having the most impact on participatory/nonparticipatory behavior of senior enlisted Army soldiers.

The four research questions were as follows:

1. What are the characteristics of participating adult learners that differentiate them from nonparticipants?

2. How does the military setting affect the type of learning opportunities available or present barriers to participation for this specific population?

3. What is the gap between the stated educational policies and reality in the provision of formal learning opportunities for career soldiers in transition?

4. Who takes advantage of these opportunities, why, and how are these opportunities limited?

Ninety-two soldiers were interviewed at one Army installation. Three factors named by interviewees categorized as nonparticipants as having the most impact on their motivations to participate in college were Interest in Subject, Learn a Specific Skill, and Job Promotion. Three factors named by participants were Obtain a Credential, Enhanced Self-Efficacy, and Prepare for a New Career.

Three factors named by nonparticipants as having the most impact on their perceived barriers to participation were Lack of Interest, Lack of Course Offerings, and

Time Constraints. Three factors indicated by participants were Type of Unit Assignment, Unsupportive Supervisors, and Frequent Relocations.

Based on the data, three recommendations are made:

1. Provide more alternative or nontraditional learning programs for adults who seek licensures and certifications in lieu of traditional postsecondary credentials.

2. Amend college and university course transfer policies so that they are sensitive to this highly mobile subgroup of nontraditional students.

3. Refine the personnel management system so that enlisted soldiers with certain military jobs are not relegated solely to tactical assignments, where educational opportunities are limited.

This study focused on soldiers at one Army installation. Studies of a similar population at other installations are recommended to determine whether soldiers face different types of barriers whereby different steps to provide educational opportunities may be warranted.

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Doctor of Education

Date

Dean

Dissertation Committee

Chairperson

DEDICATION

To my wife, Marian Antionett Covert, who has been my friend and confidante for the past 14 years. Her steadfast support and understanding motivated me to continue on the many days that I was willing to settle for the title of "ABD." I would not have completed this dissertation without her.

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It is a pleasure to acknowledge the faculty and staff at the University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education. Special thanks are expressed for the unmatched instruction and encouragement provided by Dr. Melora Sundt and Dr. Lawrence Picus, who served as advisors and members of my dissertation committee. My parents, Ann and William Covert, provided financial support throughout this process. Al Scaggs, a friend and fellow senior noncommissioned officer, provided a critical eye on earlier drafts. I am grateful to the Army leaders, administrators, and education counselors who supported my research at their installation, and for what I learned from the soldiers who offered their time and insight. Finally, I extend my deepest thanks to Dr. William G. Tierney, chair of my dissertation committee, whose guidance, high standards, and dedication to his profession serve as personal benchmarks for my future research endeavors.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Surveys administered to incoming and departing soldiers reveal educational opportunities as being significant in their decision to remain in or leave the Army. In addition, the changing global economy requires continued learning and retraining for adults to function and remain competitive in the workforce (Valentine, 1997). This fact is especially relevant for senior noncommissioned officers nearing retirement and preparing for a career transition.

While Army leaders express the need and desire for an educated workforce, identifying the impact of current educational programs, policies, and services have on senior enlisted soldiers' abilities to participate in postsecondary educational offerings has received little attention. Research instruments used to measure both motivational orientations and perceived barriers to college participation have focused on different populations and issues. As a result, studies that examine the attitudes of military personnel toward college participation lack a coherent synthesis of findings and recommendations. For example, research by Brauchle (1997) and Boesel and Johnson (1988) was limited in scope primarily to soldier retention concerns. Only studies by Murphy (1977), Meinhardt (1979), and Brown (1993) addressed both participant and nonparticipant populations.

The Problem

Studies about enlisted soldiers' reasons for participating/not participating in postsecondary education are limited. Even in the more encompassing literature on adult learners and nontraditional students there are disagreements as to which theory or model is the most advantageous for developing strategies that enhance

participation by nontraditional students. Often, the questions raised are manifestations of alternative research methods that lead to different conclusions and recommendations. For example, researchers disagree about which of the existing models, paradigms, and theories best explain participatory behavior. In order to add to the current knowledge base, Cross (1981) suggested that researchers devise frameworks that incorporate multiple perspectives and designs.

Research by Aslanian and Brickell (1980) connected changes in life circumstances with adult participation. Theories associated with transitions and life events (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995) provide a foundation for the framework outlined in chapter 3 to answer the research problem. What remains unclear is whether low participation rates for nontraditional students in transition are due solely to the Army's unique characteristics (e.g., sporadic deployments, geographical relocations, unpredictable work hours) or other contributing variables (e.g., lack of financial resources, individuals' motivational orientations, institutional commitment and support from leaders at the local level) in creating lifelong learning climates.

The questions that framed this study, determining the research design, were as follows:

- In comparison to the current literature on nontraditional students, are this select group of nontraditional students' circumstances and experiences qualitatively different?
- What are the unique characteristics of those senior Army noncommissioned officers who participate in educational offerings?
- What factors impede higher education participation for senior enlisted soldiers nearing a career or life transition?

- To what extent does the current literature on nontraditional and adult learners apply to this group in designing and implementing initiatives that enhance the military's educational support system across a service-member's career?

The Purpose

My aim for this study was to identify and compare the characteristics attributable to enlisted soldiers who participated in postsecondary educational offerings to those who did not. In addition, I wanted to find out what factors impede participation for both participants and nonparticipants. The significance of this research is that its findings will allow for (a) enhanced educational opportunities for this subgroup of nontraditional students, (b) increased organizational effectiveness, and (c) theory development.

Enhanced Learning Opportunities

Learning opportunities can be viewed as "organized," "self-directed," and "formal learning for credit" (Cross, 1981). This study identifies the environmental factors, individual characteristics, and organizational interventions that have a positive effect on postsecondary education participation for this subgroup of nontraditional students.

Organizational Effectiveness

Uncertain political and economic environments have forced the Army to transform itself to confront a broad spectrum of future military operations. Army transformation involves a reorganization of current equipment and personnel along with an infusion of scientific and technological advances to future combat systems.

The success or failure of the Army in meeting the nation's future strategic objectives will depend in large part on soldiers' abilities to quickly grasp and employ these new technologies (U.S. Department of the Army [USDA], 2002c). Therefore, the availability of postsecondary educational offerings along with an environment that promotes college participation for enlisted soldiers will lead to enhanced human and organizational capital. In turn, the Army will more effectively employ advanced technologies during the transformation process.

Theory Development

Qualitative research on the college-going experiences of senior enlisted soldiers is sparse. In addition, the relevance of current adult learner theories and models has yet to be tested with the group of nontraditional students in this study. Therefore, the knowledge generated through this study will (a) contribute to the current literature on adult learners and nontraditional students, (b) provide clarity for understanding the types of educational programs and products that best serve the needs of this group of adult learners, and (c) highlight the information that requires further assessment by the leadership of the Army for educational planning, policy formation, and program implementation. In summary, the purpose of the study is (a) to find out whether senior enlisted soldiers have different circumstances and experiences in comparison to the literature on other nontraditional students, (b) to identify the unique characteristics of those senior Army noncommissioned officers who participate in higher education offerings, (c) to identify factors that impede higher education participation for senior enlisted soldiers nearing a career or life transition, and (d) to explain how the current literature on nontraditional students applies to this group of adult learners in designing and implementing

initiatives that enhance the educational support system across a servicemember's career.

The Research Questions

The four questions investigated in this study are:

1. *What are the characteristics of participating adult learners that differentiate them from nonparticipants?*

2. *How does the military setting affect the types of learning opportunities available or present barriers to participation for this specific population?*

3. *What is the gap between the stated educational policies and reality in the provision of formal learning opportunities for career soldiers in transition?*

4. *Who takes advantage of these opportunities, why do they do so, and how are these opportunities limited?*

Research Design

As discussed in the methods section of chapter 3, one criticism of quantitative research in this area is its reliance on survey questions constructed by the researchers themselves. As a result, respondents are forced to choose a variable which may not be relevant to why they do/do not participate (Scanlan, 1986). I chose a qualitative research design in order to gain soldiers' individual perspectives void of predetermined response categories (Patton, 1980).

I interviewed both participants and nonparticipants at one Army installation. The format of the individual interviews was structured. During the interviews, soldiers responded to 18 specific questions related to individual demographic characteristics and nondemographic attributes. Questions about nondemographic variables included both dispositional and situational factors. For example,

interviewees were asked to state their age, race, marital status, and parents' highest level of educational attainment (demographic factors). Interview questions related to nondemographic factors included (a) probes about interviewees' current life and career status (situational factors), (b) attitudes toward higher education in general, and (c) opinions and beliefs about how to enhance educational opportunities (dispositional factors).

The information obtained from these soldiers can therefore be used to better understand how to promote educational participation for those nearing a transition. In the following chapters I describe how soldiers at Fort Military (a pseudonym for the actual army installation at which the present study was conducted) experienced for-credit educational opportunities, and what should be implemented to enhance postsecondary participation. I present data on soldiers' attitudes about barriers to participation and the sources of these obstacles, as well as the motivational orientations of the participating soldiers. This information serves as the basis for the conclusions and recommendations in chapter 5 for enhancing educational participation for senior enlisted soldiers nearing a life transition.

Research Strategy

Researchers define and categorize nontraditional students in a number of ways. Similar to the literature on nontraditional students' motivational orientations and barriers to participation in postsecondary educational opportunities, numerous factors are involved in whether or not senior noncommissioned officers have taken a college course in the past 5 years.

For this study, I defined both participants/nonparticipants as those soldiers who had at least an Associate degree or commensurate credit hours. These

participants/nonparticipants were then categorized as those soldiers who had/had not taken a college course in the past 5 years and were/were not pursuing a Bachelor degree (Figure 1).

Figure 1 details four additional factors that directed sampling procedures: type of job/unit assignment, postsecondary education level, parents' highest level of education, and time in service. The factors listed for the target population are common characteristics for participants and nonparticipants. At Fort Military, a total of 860 staff sergeants (E-6) and above had 15 or more years of service. The number of the above senior noncommissioned officers nearing retirement and facing a career transition who were enrolled in college courses at the time of the study was as follows: 45 graduate level, 90 Bachelor level (participants), and 172 Associate level. Of the remaining 503 soldiers in the target population, 138 (nonparticipants) had at least an Associate degree or commensurate credit hours and had not taken a college class in the past 5 years. Table 1 lists the above factors along with the number of participants/nonparticipants by race, gender, marital status, and type of unit.

After listing in alphabetical order the education records of the above 90 sergeants currently pursuing a Bachelor degree, I selected every third record, for a total of 25 individual participant interviews. For the selection of individual nonparticipant interviews, I listed in alphabetical order the education records of the 138 sergeants who were not currently pursuing a Bachelor degree, and selected every fifth record. I then compared the factors listed in Table 1 of those selected for participants individual interviews with those selected for nonparticipants individual interviews to ensure that a proportional representation existed for both groups. I used the same sampling procedures for the focus group interviews.

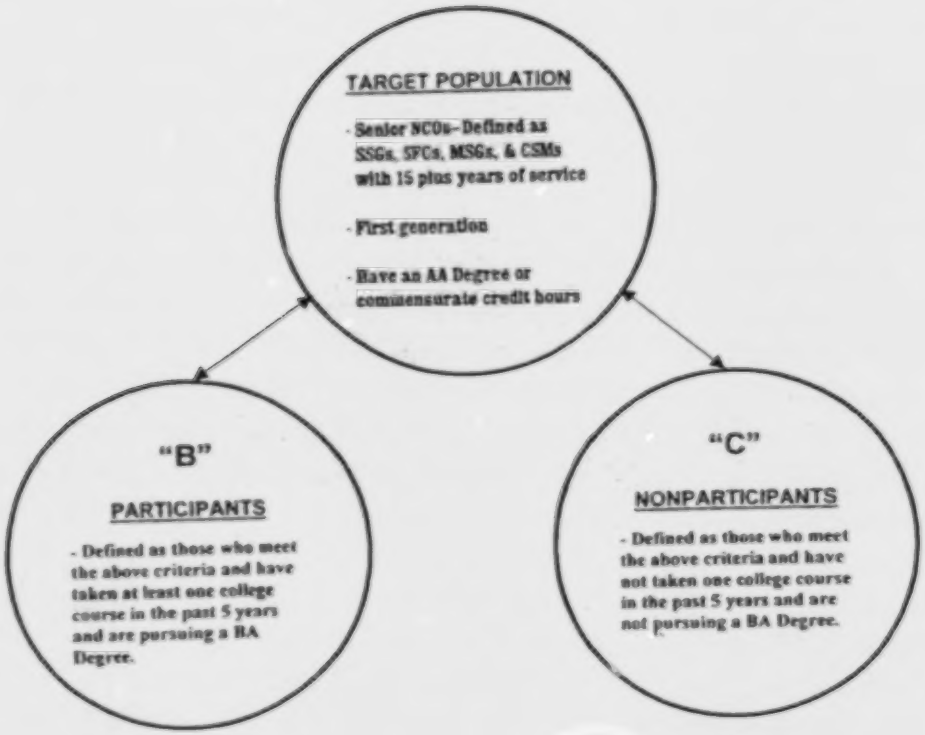
TARGET POPULATION
- Senior NCOs- Defined as SSGs, SFCs, MSGs, & CSMs with 15 plus years of service
- First generation
- Have an AA Degree or commensurate credit hours
"B"
PARTICIPANTS
- Defined as those who meet the above criteria and have taken at least one college course in the past 5 years and are pursuing a BA Degree.
"C"
NONPARTICIPANTS
- Defined as those who meet the above criteria and have not taken one college course in the past 5 years and are not pursuing a BA Degree.

Figure 1. Target population of the study. NCOs = noncommissioned officers; SSGs = staff sergeants, enlisted noncommissioned officers below the rank of sergeant first class; SFCs = sergeant first class, enlisted noncommissioned officers below the rank of master sergeant; MSGs = master sergeants, enlisted noncommissioned officers below the rank of command sergeants major; CSMs = command sergeants major, enlisted noncommissioned officers, the highest enlisted rank; AA = Associate degree; BA = Bachelor's degree.

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Table 1

Soldier Profiles for Individual/Focus Group Interviews in Target Population

	Participants				Nonparticipants			
Ethnicity and gender	Married	Single	Field unit	Garrison unit	Married	Single	Field unit	Garrison unit
Asian female	3	1	2	2	3	1	2	2
Black female	3	3	1	5	6	4	5	5
Hispanic female	2	1	1	2	5	2	4	3
Native American female	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
White female	29	2	13	18	43	6	29	20
Asian male	2	0	1	1	6	0	4	2
Black male	8	1	4	5	12	1	8	5
Hispanic male	3	0	1	2	2	0	2	0
Native American male	2	0	0	2	2	0	1	1
White male	26	4	10	20	41	3	29	15
Totals	78	12	33	57	120	18	84	54

Assumptions

For this study I made the following assumptions: (a) The research design allowed for the findings and conclusions to have a high degree of trustworthiness, (b) the interviewees responded honestly and to the best of their ability, (c) the themes and categories derived from the data analysis have a degree of applicability and generalizability to senior enlisted soldiers across the United States Army, and (d) the four additional factors that I chose to identify the target population (type of job/unit assignment, postsecondary education level, parents' highest level of education, and time-in-service) were the most advantageous for investigating senior Army enlisted soldiers' attitudes and behaviors toward postsecondary opportunities when nearing a life transition.

Limitations

The data analysis and findings of this study are limited by (a) the number of participants interviewed who agreed to participate voluntarily, (b) the amount of time available to conduct the study, (c) data collection from only one research site, and (d) the degree to which the reader deems the instruments used for data collection as reliable measures for answering the research questions.

First, I cannot state emphatically that the responses given by voluntary interviewees are the same as those that might have been given by those who chose not to be interviewed. A limitation is that people who want to be interviewed are a self-selected group and by no means representative. It might very well have been the case that those who elected not to participate in the individual and focus group interviews had different experiences and attitudes toward college participation than did those who volunteered.

Second, limitations on the amount of time available to conduct this study did not allow for any type of follow-up questions with those in the target population who elected not to participate after completion of the initial contact questionnaire. As opposed to personal orientations toward college participation being a lack of ability or interest, soldiers' reasons for not agreeing to be interviewed might have been as benign as an upcoming deployment or field training exercise.

Third, case studies focus on the complexity and particularity of a single situation. One weakness of choosing this approach is that the findings do not allow for generalizations across different sites and geographical areas (Stake, 1995). For example, while the education center at Fort Military can be categorized as typical of other Army education centers, based on types of counseling services and degree offerings available to soldiers, this is not to say that the observed in-processing procedures and counseling sessions discussed in chapter 4 are the same across Army installations. The United States Army is comprised of different organizational subcultures based on different missions, geographical locations, military occupational specialties (MOSs), and demographic compositions. Therefore, findings from this study do not allow for broad generalizations. Future research using a similar protocol and the interview questions used in this study would help to verify the reliability of the instruments used for this study.

Just as no single definition for nontraditional students exists, senior enlisted soldiers do not possess a finite list of characteristics attributable to them. Nevertheless, senior noncommissioned officers can be viewed as sharing certain traits. The definitions briefly explained above in the research design section, along with the categories defined in chapter 3, allowed for themes to emerge from the data.

Definition of Terms

Adult learners. In addition to the definition for nontraditional students provided above, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) categorized adult learners as those 25 years of age or older (1992). For this study, adult learners were categorized as nontraditional students. In addition, they were viewed as either participants or nonparticipants based on whether they had or had not taken a college course toward a Bachelor degree within the past 5 years.

Learning opportunities. Learning opportunities can be categorized as "organized learning activities," "self-directed learning activities" and "formal learning for credit" (Cross, 1981). While numerous learning opportunities were available for soldiers at Fort Military, this study focused on participants/nonparticipants in formal, for-credit college courses.

Nontraditional students. Cross (1981) defined nontraditional students as adults who participate in higher education either full- or part-time while simultaneously balancing the demands of other responsibilities such as employment and family obligations. Also referred to as adult learners, this group of students now comprises over 50% of higher education enrollments (MacKinnon-Slaney, 1994). For this study, nontraditional students were defined as senior noncommissioned officers with 15 or more years of service and holding at least an Associate degree.

Participation/nonparticipation. Learning has been defined by Tough (1971) as an effort to acquire new knowledge or a skill. Adults can participate in a continuum of learning settings from informal to formal. For this study, participation/nonparticipation was defined having taken or not having taken at least one for-credit, college-level course in the past 5 years.

Organization of the Dissertation

In this chapter I introduced the problems associated with higher education participation for senior enlisted Army adult learners. I detailed the purpose and focus of the study. The four research questions were presented, along with an overview of the methods used to answer them. I explained how soldiers were categorized as senior noncommissioned officers and defined what constituted participation/nonparticipation for this population.

Below, I briefly describe the types of learning opportunities at Fort Military for senior enlisted soldiers facing a career transition. I then detail the types of postsecondary offerings available for soldiers at this Army installation.

One measure of soldier professional and personal development is civilian education attainment. Since the focus of this study is to investigate senior Army enlisted soldiers' attitudes and behaviors toward higher education participation/ nonparticipation when nearing a life transition, I present an Army-wide analysis of senior enlisted soldiers' current level of postsecondary education. In addition, I detail the senior enlisted promotion results by college education levels in order to establish a context for the discussion to follow in chapters 4 and 5.

In chapter 2 I review the literature on adult learner motivational orientations. I examine the models related to barriers and deterrents to participation from dispositional, situational, and environmental perspectives. Theories associated with transitions and life events (Schlossberg et al., 1995) provide a foundation for the framework outlined in chapter 3. A survey of the research suggests that (a) numerous characteristics attributable to nontraditional students do not allow for a single adult learner categorization or profile, (b) different research methods result in different answers to why someone does or does not participate in adult educational

programs, and (c) the reasons for participation and the factors that impede participation are varied and complex.

This study identifies the characteristics of a subgroup of nontraditional students. After reviewing the literature on military personnel and their participation/nonparticipation in postsecondary educational opportunities, I investigate to what degree current models, paradigms, and theories explain participatory behavior of senior noncommissioned officers nearing a career or life transition. Embedded within the review is Cross's (1981) Chain-of-Response (COR) Model, which incorporates the common elements of motivation, deterrent, and transition theories.

Chapter 3 expands on the research methods used to answer the research questions. First, I discuss the research design to include how the research site was selected. I then explain my rationale for the questions to both the individual and focus group interviews. Next I describe the structure of the interviews, the characteristics of the soldiers that participated in the study, and the types of units at Fort Military. A discussion about research ethics, data trustworthiness, reliability, and validity follows. Finally, issues relating to researcher bias are presented.

In chapter 4 I present the data on the research questions. First, I reveal the data from the four categories (Individual History, Parents History--Aspects of first-generation students, Present--Motivation/Barriers/Life Transitions, and Policy) of the individual interviews. Second, I present the data on the four categories from the focus group interviews. Third, I describe my personal observations of the installation's education in-processing procedures. Fourth, I list data obtained from soldiers' written comments on the initial questionnaire, education records, and the installation's command policy letters on educational opportunities. Fifth, I present

an analysis of the data in order to identify the degree to which current adult learner theories and models are relevant to the factors identified in this study.

In chapter 5 I provide conclusions regarding each of the research questions. I offer implications for the study's findings. Finally, I provide recommendations for Army policymakers that will enhance senior noncommissioned officers' participation in postsecondary educational opportunities when nearing a life transition.

Prior to a survey of the literature in chapter 2, I describe below the types of learning opportunities available for senior enlisted soldiers at Fort Military. I then detail the types of postsecondary educational offerings that were available. I have suggested that one element of soldier professional and personal development is the current civilian educational level of senior enlisted soldiers. Accordingly, I present an Army-wide analysis of senior enlisted soldiers' current level of postsecondary education to establish a context for the Army education system as a whole, the data presentation and analysis in chapter 4, and the implications and recommendations sections of chapter 5.

Learning Opportunities

Adult learners have different type of learning needs. For example, research confirms that most adults prefer active as opposed to passive approaches to learning. Classroom instruction that integrates instruction with life and work experiences is also highly valued (Benshoff, 1991). Other special needs for adult learners include flexible course schedules and instruction appropriate for their developmental level (Cross, 1981).

At Fort Military, servicemembers had access to the education center's MOS Library of Publications (army regulations, field manuals, technical manuals,

technical bulletins, and technical circulars), a computer laboratory with classrooms and Internet access, army correspondence courses, independent study and external degree programs (DANTES), College Level Examination Program (CLEP), DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSST), college entrance examination (ACT, SAT, GRE, and GMAT) study guides, interest/aptitude tests, and national certification examinations (NTE, ASE). In addition, counselors were available on a walk-in basis during the weekday.

At the time of the study, Fort Military was not one of the three installations taking part in the Army's recent online education initiative known as Army University Access Online (eArmyU.com; USDA, 2002e). Therefore, soldiers were not able to enroll in online courses provided by a nationwide consortium of 23 colleges and universities offering more than 90 degree programs.

Degrees Offered at Fort Military

Fort Military offered to soldiers college courses from (a) one 2-year college (Carnegie Classification-AA) with Associate degrees in General Studies, Administration of Justice, Business Administration, Electronic Technology, and Middle Management, (b) one school of business and management (Carnegie Classification-Bus) with Bachelor degrees in Business Administration and Business Management and a Master of Arts degree in Organizational Management, (c) one private (Carnegie Classification-MA I) with Bachelor degrees in Criminal Justice, Occupational Education, Health Administration, Religion, and Computer Information Systems, and (d) one Master's (comprehensive) college and university (Carnegie Classification-MA I) with Bachelor degrees in Behavioral Science, General Studies, Accounting, Information Technology, and International Business, and

Master's degrees in International Business, Information Technology, and Information Systems Engineering. In addition, soldiers could elect to take courses at a doctoral/research university-extensive (Carnegie Classification-DR Ext) satellite campus in the neighboring city of Fort Military (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2002).

All of the colleges and universities had representatives available at the installation education center on weekdays. All classes were held on-post in the evenings, with the exception of the research university. Classes for this university were held at its satellite campus off-post.

All of the colleges and universities with operations on Fort Military were members of the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC). This is a consortium of over 110 institutions working to meet the higher education needs of servicemembers Army-wide. The main focus of SOC is that members agree to transfer credits, limit academic residency requirements (five to six courses), recognize credits recommended in the American Council on Education (ACE) guide, and establish formal degree plans (USDA, 2002a).

The majority of soldiers were afforded Tuition Assistance (TA). The Department of Defense (DoD) TA Policy covers 75% of tuition costs, or up to $187.50 per semester hour; whichever is less, up to a cap of $3,500 per fiscal year and subject to availability of funds (Department of Defense, 1997). The procedures for getting TA at Fort Military were: (a) The eligible servicemember sees an education center counselor to get a TA Form; (b) staff sergeants (E6) and below have the form signed by their commander, and all sergeants first class and above sign their own form; (c) the servicemember returns the form to the education center for signature by the counselor; (d) the TA Form is then considered a signed

"check" that the servicemember submits to the respective college or university; (e) if the TA Form is not signed by the education center before the servicemember attends class, the soldier is viewed as attending class without funding from the Army; and (f) after submission of the TA Form to the institution, the servicemember is responsible for the remaining portion of tuition plus textbook and other fees.

In chapter 3 I list the number of soldiers in the target population eligible to use tuition assistance. In chapter 4 I present the interviewees' attitudes toward tuition assistance, other factors that impact their decision-making process about postsecondary participation/nonparticipation, and their perspectives about what can be done to enhance college participation. In addition, I outline my observations of in-processing procedures at Fort Military and examine whether stated education policies and procedures were representative of soldiers' actual experiences.

Civilian Education Profile Analysis

One element of soldiers' professional and personal development is their current civilian education level. The data presented in this section provide a foundation for the presentation of the data analysis in chapter 4 and for the recommendations and conclusion sections of chapter 5. The educational levels of Army commissioned officers for fiscal year 2000 (FY00) are depicted in Figure 2. Of the 68,311 commissioned active-Army officers in FY00, over 88% (60,300) had a Bachelor degree or higher. Figure 3 portrays the education attainment levels of all Army enlisted soldiers for FY00. Less than 4%, or 13,760 out of 402,100 active-Army enlisted soldiers, had a Bachelor degree or higher. Figure 4 is a composite of the education levels of both officers and enlisted soldiers. In comparison to the

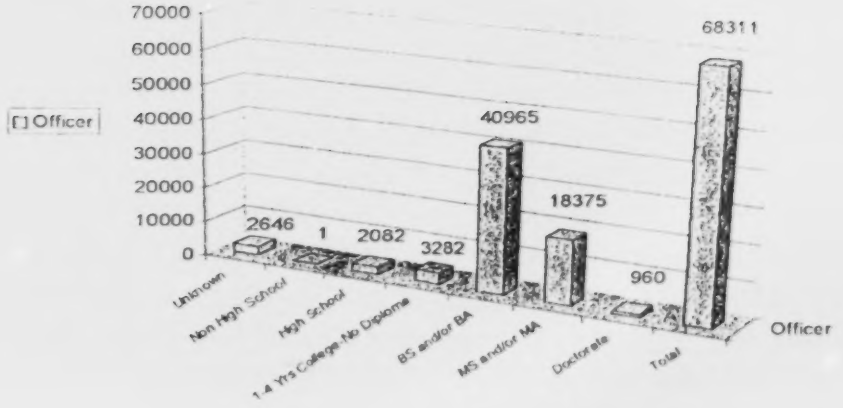

Figure 2. FY00 officer education levels. BS = Bachelor of Science degree; MS = Master of Science degree; BS = Bachelor of Science degree; BA = Bachelor of Arts degree. Source: U.S. Department of the Army, *PERSCOM promotions*, 2002f, retrieved January 15, 2002, from http://www.perscom.army.mil/select/.pdf

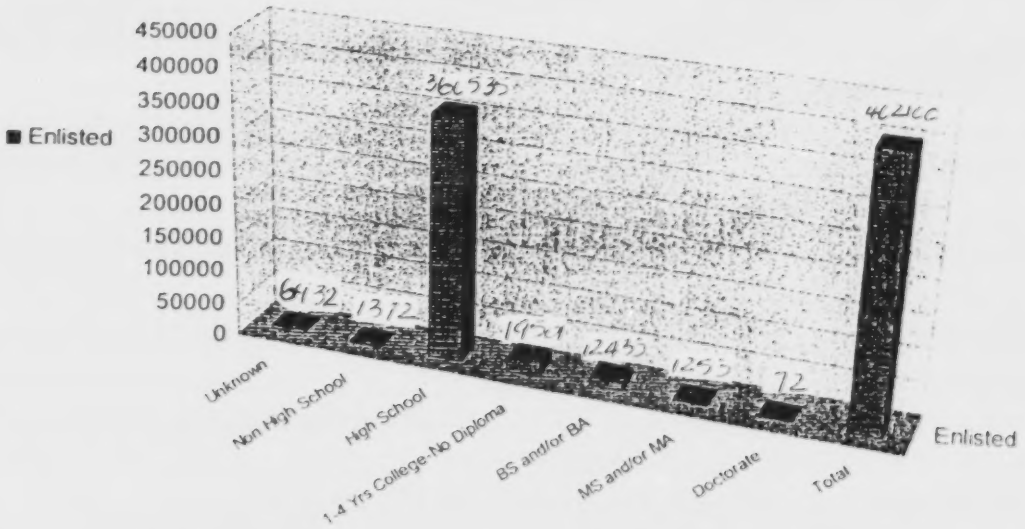

Figure 3. FY00 enlisted education levels. BS = Bachelor of Science degree; MS = Master of Science degree; BS = Bachelor of Science degree; BA = Bachelor of Arts degree. Source: U.S. Department of the Army, *PERSCOM promotions*, 2002f, retrieved January 15, 2002, from http://www.perscom.army.mil/select/.pdf

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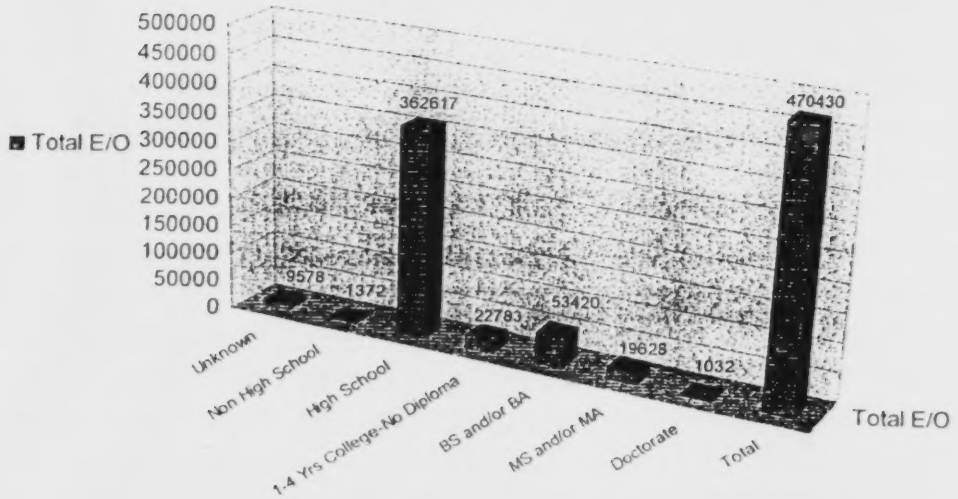

Figure 4. FY00 enlisted/officer education levels. BS = Bachelor of Science degree; MS = Master of Science degree; BS = Bachelor of Science degree; BA = Bachelor of Arts degree; E/O = enlisted personnel and officers. Source: U.S. Department of the Army, *PERSCOM promotions*, 2002f, retrieved January 15, 2002, from http://www.perscom.army.mil/select/.pdf

Table 2

Educational Attainment of the U.S. Population 2000

Highest level reached	%
8th grade or less	7.0
Some high school, no diploma	8.9
High school diploma	33.1
Some college, no degree	17.6
Associate degree	7.8
Bachelor's degree	17.0
Master's degree	5.9
Doctoral degree	1.2
Professional degree	1.5

Note. Total = 175.2 million adults. The figures are based on a Census Bureau survey of 62,500 households conducted in March 2000 and cover adults age 25 and older.

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education levels of the civilian population, the percentage of Army officers with a Bachelor degree or more is 4 times greater, while enlisted soldiers fall dramatically below national statistics.

Figures 2, 3, and 4 allow for three immediate observations: (a) There is a great disparity between Army officers and enlisted soldiers in regard to civilian education attainment levels, to the point of viewing the two groups as the educational "haves" and "have-nots"; (b) the Army Officer Corps has education attainment levels much higher than the American population as a whole; and (c) the education level for enlisted soldiers with Bachelor degrees or higher is much lower than the national average (see Table 2).

The disparity between commissioned and enlisted soldiers' educational attainment levels can be explained partially by different educational requirements for the two groups. For example, Army commissioned officers are required to have at least a Bachelor degree for continued service, while there is no degree requirement for noncommissioned or enlisted soldiers.

However, the literature on why adults participate in learning suggests that a primary reason why adults participate in higher education is to gain a credential. Thus, one motivation for pursuing a college degree is monetary gain in the form of job promotion or advancement (Boshier, 1971; Burgess, 1971; Houle, 1961; Johnstone & Rivera, 1965; Morstain & Smart, 1977; Tough, 1968).

Figure 5 depicts the promotion rates of senior enlisted soldiers by education levels for FY00. Of the 18,572 eligible for promotion to the two highest senior enlisted ranks, 2,667 (14%) were selected overall. A total 356 soldiers (13%) of those selected for advancement held a Bachelor degree or higher. However, soldiers with only an Associate degree were selected for promotion at almost

double the rate than those with a Bachelor degree (633 versus 321, respectively). Furthermore, two senior enlisted soldiers holding doctorates were not selected for promotion. At first blush, higher levels of college attainment for senior enlisted soldiers appear to have had a negative impact on their selection for promotion.

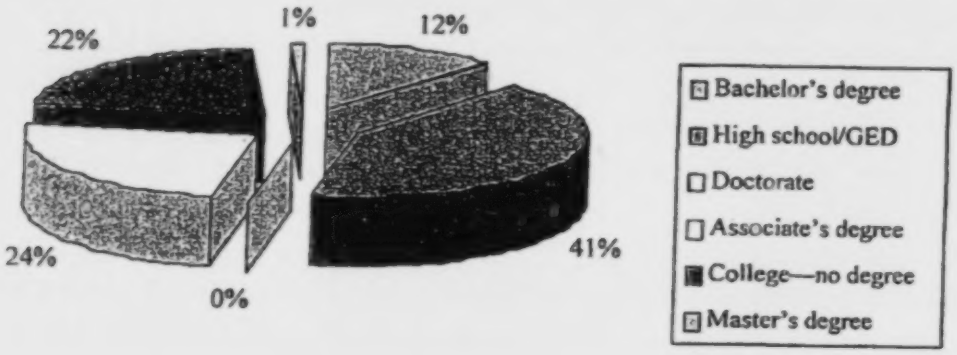

Figure 5. FY00 senior enlisted promotions by education level. Source: U.S. Department of the Army, *PERSCOM promotions*, 2002f, retrieved January 15, 2002, from http://www.perscom.army.mil/select/.pdf

This phenomenon can be explained partially by the fact that numerous considerations (individual performance appraisals, number and types of awards/ recognitions, past duty assignments) are part of the selection process. Education attainment is weighted equally with all other factors. Nevertheless, the results of the FY00 senior enlisted promotions are inconsistent with the Army's stated education policy and the literature on motivation theory discussed in chapter 3, along with the findings presented in chapter 4. For example, Army enlisted soldiers are given the opportunity to attend off-duty classes and they are encouraged to participate voluntarily in order to enhance their military effectiveness to prepare for productive post-service careers (USDA, 1993).

In summary, a survey of the research suggests that (a) numerous characteristics attributable to nontraditional students do not allow for a single adult learner categorization or profile, (b) different research methods result in different answers to why someone does or does not participate in adult educational programs, and (c) the reasons for participation and the factors that impede participation are varied and complex.

CHAPTER 2

SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to synthesize the current body of knowledge on motivational, deterrent, and transition theories as related to adult learners. I begin with an expansion of the definition of terms presented in chapter 1 to include a review of the Life Transition Theory of Schlossberg et al. (1995). Next, I provide an overview of the established adult learner theories. Then I outline how these different learning perspectives frame the explanations for participatory behavior. Because the reasons for participation and the factors that impede participation are complex (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999), I incorporate a review of Cross's (1981) COR Model, which features the common elements of the theories mentioned in this chapter. Variables associated with adults' nonparticipation in postsecondary opportunities are presented next. I then highlight the common elements of the current theories and discuss the efforts that have been applied to research in military-specific environments.

After an examination of how the current literature on nontraditional students' participation in higher education is limited, I outline what criticisms have been made against past research methods and findings. I conclude with a synthesis of (a) the gaps in the literature about adult participation in general, (b) the areas for future research in military settings, and (c) the parts of the current literature that provide the foundation for this study's framework.

Conceptual Definitions

Researchers have applied multiple definitions to the key terms reviewed in this section. Below I discuss how these concepts have been used in the literature and explain how the terms were defined for this study.

Nontraditional Students

A majority of the established theories and models about college students were developed using traditional-age White male student experiences exclusively (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Tierney, 1993). However, instead of college campuses being populated by White, 18- to 24-year-old males, living in dormitories, without external responsibilities such as family and work (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998), institutions of higher education are now populated by students who are older, ethnically and racially diverse, and have obligations and concerns outside of academe (Jalomo, 1995; Rendon, 1994; Terenzini et al., 1994). As opposed to being enrolled full time, this growing segment of students is often composed of first-generation, part-time enrollees who reside off campus and commute to classes (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Also referred to as adult learners, nontraditional students now comprise over 50% of higher education enrollments (MacKinnon-Slaney, 1994).

This changing student demography has resulted in the expansion of research on nontraditional students in various postsecondary educational settings. While researchers now recognize that past assumptions about traditional student characteristics are not the best factors for measuring individual and organizational traits that lead to college participation (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998), the identification of variables attributable to nontraditional students remains problematic. For example, the literature is replete with various research methods, perspectives, and

findings. For the most part, researchers have conceived nontraditional student characteristics as those not embodied by traditional students (Munday, 1976). Because this group is more diverse than traditional-age students, this premise fails to capture the multiple variables that shape nontraditional students' college-going experiences.

Nonetheless, nontraditional students can be conceptualized as having certain characteristics attributable to them (Horn & Carroll, 1996). Cross (1981) defined nontraditional students as adults who participate in higher education either full time or part time while simultaneously balancing the demands of other responsibilities such as employment and family obligations. As elaborated in chapter 3, for this study, nontraditional students were defined as senior Army noncommissioned officers with 15 or more years of service and holding at least an Associate degree. In addition, participants and nonparticipants shared common characteristics: (a) they were enlisted soldiers, (b) they were older, (c) they attended college part time, (d) they worked full time, (e) they possessed a high school diploma or equivalent, (f) they had completed an Associate degree, and (g) they were near retirement and a career transition.

Participation

Tough (1971) defined learning as efforts by individuals to acquire new knowledge or skills. Under this broad definition, adults can participate in a continuum of learning settings from informal to formal. Aslanian and Brickell (1980) defined participation in informal learning activities as those planned and initiated by the individual learner, such as home maintenance or gardening. Kim

and Creighton (1999) defined participation in formal learning activities as those organized by someone other than the individual with an instructor.

Cross (1981) synthesized the literature of adult participation and categorized three types of learning activities: (a) organized learning activities, (b) self-directed learning, and (c) adult learning for academic credit. In chapter 1 I mentioned the different types of learning opportunities available to soldiers at Fort Military. For this study, I applied Cross's (1981) conceptualization of adult participation. Therefore, the focus of this study was limited to participation/nonparticipation in adult learning for academic credit.

However, similar to the various types of learning settings discussed above, researchers suggest various timeframes for measuring participation in the continuum of learning activities (Kim & Creighton, 1999). For example, under Tough's (1971) broad definition of continued or self-directed learning, almost all adults can be viewed as participants. Other researchers have defined adult participation as learning activities that occurred in the previous 12 months (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; Kim & Creighton). Given the disparity in the literature between the types of learning activities and what constitutes participation, I now turn to a discussion about what factors framed my definition of participation/nonparticipation. Two factors that impacted why I did not apply a 12-month time frame to categorize soldiers' formal adult learning were individuals' type-of-unit assignments and servicemembers' current education level. While I expound on these variables in chapter 3, I introduce the significance of these considerations below.

For example, one variable that affects participation/nonparticipation for senior enlisted soldiers is the range of characteristics associated with various military occupation specialties (MOSs). Some MOSs are associated with tactical

or "field" units, while others are categorized as strategic or "garrison" units. Soldiers with job specialties that assign them to the former are more inclined to be deployed and to experience unpredictable work hours. Soldiers with garrison MOSs have more predictable work hours when deployments and field training exercises are limited. Therefore, the opportunity to enroll in college courses during off-duty time is partially dependent upon a soldier's job. For some, opportunities are abundant, while others are unable to participate due to deployments and training exercises.

As alluded to in chapter 1, the second factor that influences whether senior noncommissioned officers participate in formal educational activities is the individual's current education level. This is supported by research outlined in the Theoretical Foundations section in this chapter. For example, one consideration for advancement or promotion for enlisted soldiers is the type of college degree held. Therefore, a majority of senior noncommissioned officers had taken some college courses during their careers. Because the Army's enlisted promotion system awards only up to 100 points or 100 semester hours toward promotion, the assumption was that, as a soldier nears this threshold, his or her motivation for continuing in postsecondary educational opportunities might decrease.

In the Nontraditional Students section, I categorized the subgroup who participated in the study by shared common characteristics in order to establish a benchmark for the research findings. A baseline was established for participation because different definitions are used for the term based on the type and timeframe of the learning activity. Thus, for this study I limited the broad spectrum of learning opportunities to formal, for-credit, college courses. In addition, the time frame that was chosen to delineate participation from nonparticipation was based on the

assumptions about the unique circumstances of Army enlisted soldiers described above. Therefore, participation/nonparticipation was defined as the activities of those soldiers in the target population who had/had not taken at least one for-credit, college-level course in the past 5 years.

The literature on adult learner development and transitions is helpful in understanding the motivations and barriers associated with educational participation/nonparticipation of nontraditional students. Adult development theory encompasses various biological, psychological, sociocultural, and cognitive perspectives. Determining the impact of psychological changes on learning in adulthood can be viewed from sequential, life events and transitions, and relational models of development (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Schlossberg et al., 1995). Because my focus of inquiry is centered on senior noncommissioned officers preparing for a career transition, I now review the theory associated with life events and transitions.

Adult Learners in Transition

Schlossberg et al. (1995) defined a transition as "any event, or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 27). The meaning that individuals assign to an event or non-event is based on the type (anticipated, unanticipated, non-event), context (relationship to transition and the setting), and impact (alterations in daily life) of that event/non-event (Evans et al., 1998; Schlossberg et al.).

Anticipated events are ones that occur predictably. Unanticipated events are ones that occur unexpectedly, such as a death or illness. A non-event is an expected transition that does not materialize. For example, a career Army soldier

might expect to retire after 20 years of service. If the soldier decides to stay on active duty past this point, the experience becomes a non-event.

The second part of the transition model is the transition process. Schlossberg et al. (1995) viewed this process as a series of "moving in," "moving through," and "moving out" phases. The factors (situation, support, self, and strategies) that impact how a person copes with a particular event or non-event are depicted in Figure 6 (Evans et al., 1998).

The *situation* includes trigger, timing, control, role change, duration, previous experience with a similar transition, concurrent stress, and assessment factors. The *support* factor refers to four types of social support: intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and institutions and communities. The *self* factor includes personal and demographic characteristics such as socioeconomic status, gender, and age. Psychological factors such as ego development and the degree of self-efficacy also affect the transition process. The final factor for coping with transitions is labeled *strategies*. This part of the transition model consists of three categories (modify situation, control meaning, and manage stress in aftermath) and four coping modes (information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior).

For this study, I defined adult learners in transition as (a) nontraditional students, (b) holding at least an Associate degree, (c) either participants/nonparticipants based on whether they had/had not taken a college course toward a Bachelor degree in the past 5 years, (d) senior enlisted Army noncommissioned officers with 15 or more years of service, and (e) nearing retirement and facing a new career.

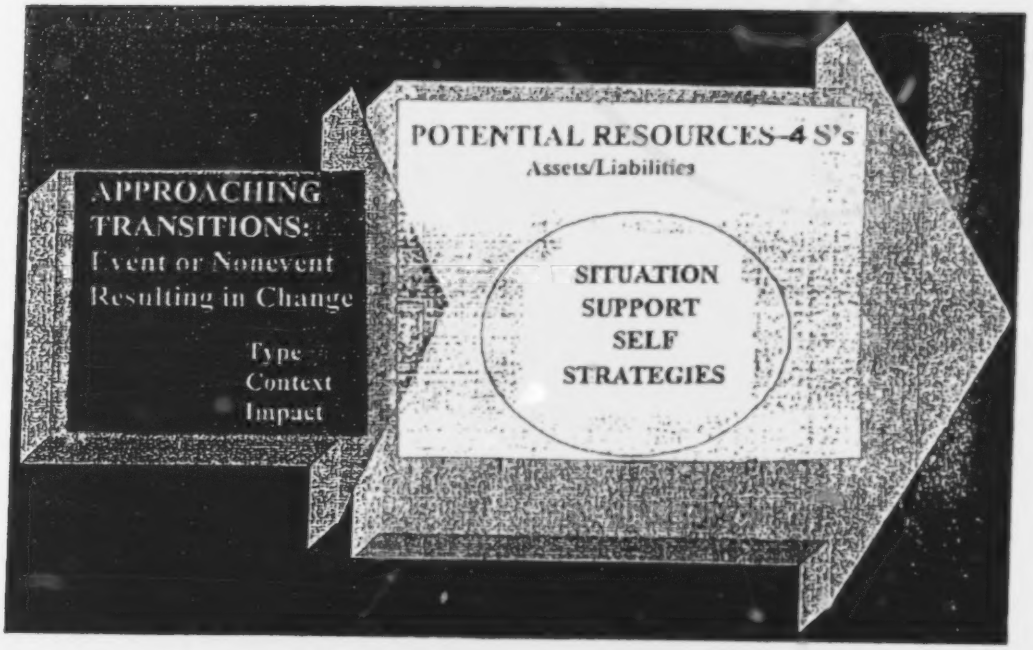

Figure 6. The individual transition process. Source: *Counseling Adults in Transition: Linking Practice With Theory*, by N. K. Schlossberg, E. B. Waters, and J. Goodman, 1995, New York: Springer.

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The above theory only partially explains participatory/nonparticipatory behavior of senior enlisted soldiers at Fort Military. In fact, Cross's COR Model described later in this chapter demonstrates how life transitions is but one of five variables that collectively affect the decision-making process of nontraditional students. As detailed in chapter 4, the phenomenon of participation/nonparticipation for this group is indeed complex. One of the criticisms of current research findings is the lack of frameworks that incorporate multiple perspectives and designs (Cross, 1981). In the Theoretical Foundations section I review the literature on explanatory, dispositional, and composite models of participation. I then apply the Life Transition Theory of Schlossberg et al. (1995), Cross's (1981) COR Model, and motivational/deterrent research to the cognitivist learning orientation. Prior to a review of the literature on motivational and deterrent theories, I outline below the five orientations to learning that are the foundations of adult learner theory.

Adult Learner Theories: A Review of the Literature

Numerous theories and stage development models for adult learners are helpful in understanding the unique characteristics of nontraditional students. I outlined how the literature on transitions and life events is applicable to the group of nontraditional students in this study. In addition, the Conceptual Definitions section demonstrates how learning is defined in a variety of ways. Explaining what happens during this process is known as learning theory. Five orientations to the learning process are outlined below: behaviorist, social learning, humanist, constructivist, and cognitivist (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Behaviorism has its foundations in the work of B. F. Skinner. Behaviorists' view of the learning process involves a change in behavior with the locus of learning being stimulated by the external environment. Under this orientation to learning, skill development and training are the purposes of adult learning. Educational practices that are an outgrowth of behaviorism include computer-assisted instruction and competency-based education (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Bandura (1986) and Rotter (1954) viewed the social learning process as an interaction with and observation of others in a social context. Because this learning theory places emphasis on individuals' interactions with others and their environment, Bandura stressed the importance of adults' sense of self-efficacy, while Rotter's concept of internal versus external locus of control partially explains whether one decides to engage in adult learning opportunities. Modeling new roles and behavior is the purpose of education under this learning orientation (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Adult learning theory and concepts associated with andragogy are closely related to humanists' view of the learning process. Learning theorists Abraham Maslow (1970) and Carl Rogers (1983) viewed the learning process as a personal act to fulfill individual potential. Humanists believe that the purpose of education is to become self-actualized and autonomous. As Sahakian (1984) noted,

> Although self-actualization is the primary goal of learning, there are other goals: (1) The discovery of a vocation or destiny, (2) The knowledge or acquisition of a set of values, (3) The realization of life as precious, (4) The acquisition of peak experiences, (5) The sense of accomplishment, (6) The satisfaction of psychological needs, (7) The refreshing of consciousness to an awareness of the beauty and wonder of life, (8) The control of impulses, (9) The grappling with the critical existential problems of life, and (10) Learning to choose discriminatively. (p. 439)

As opposed to behaviors being determined by one's environment, humanists believe that individuals control their own destiny (Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1983). In summary, the humanistic orientation to adult learning values the concepts of self-directed learning and andragogy.

Constructivists suggest that the learning process is the construction of meaning from experience. Stated another way, "Learning is a process of constructing meaning; it is how people make sense of their experience" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 261). The purpose of education for those with a constructivist orientation is to construct knowledge with the locus of learning being the individual (Merriam & Caffarella).

The cognitive orientation to learning was developed by researchers Wertheimer, Kohler, Koffka, and Lewin (Hergenhahn, 1988; Ormrod, 1995). Cognitivists suggest that the learning process consists of internal mental processes to include insight, information processing, memory, and perception. Rather than learning being influenced by environmental factors, cognitivists believe that the locus of control for learning resides with the individual and his or her internal cognitive structuring (Di Vesta, 1987). For those with this learning orientation, the purpose of education is to develop the capacity and skills to learn better (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

As mentioned in chapter 1, alternative research methods about adults' participation in educational activities have led to various research conclusions and recommendations. The learning orientations described in this section direct individuals' perspectives toward research methods and designs. However, the majority of the literature on motivational and deterrent theory reviewed in this chapter comes from researchers with a cognitivist orientation toward learning

because they start with the premise that individuals have some control over their environment (Cross, 1981).

Theoretical Foundations

"A theory is a set of abstract principles than can be used to predict facts and to organize them within a particular body of knowledge" (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 4). Thus, an established theory identifies and explains the relationship between pertinent factors for a topic of study (Scanlan, 1986). In relation to the literature on nontraditional students, "models are visual representations of how concepts related to participation interact to explain who participates and perhaps even predict who will participate in the future" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 60). Stated another way, models provide a foundation for researchers to test assumptions about a phenomenon (Scanlan). Theoretical models of participation can be viewed from three perspectives. I review the literature on explanatory, dispositional, and composite models of participation.

Explanatory Models of Participation

Knox and Videbeck's (1963) theory of patterned participation was the first research effort that attempted to explain the relationships among situational, social, and psychological aspects of adult participation. This theory explained participatory behavior as the interaction of (a) an individual's current role and status, (b) personal and environmental restraints, and (c) availability of educational opportunities. Knox and Videbeck suggested that an additional force (changes in life circumstances) could positively affect participatory responses.

According to Miller's (1967) conceptual framework, both individual motivation (needs) and environmental forces (social structures) must be at high

levels in order for educational activity to be initiated and sustained. When a person's needs and social structures are in conflict, participation becomes either erratic or nonexistent. However, Dhanidina and Griffith (1975) developed a more simplistic and logical explanation of participatory behavior.

Based on an economic or investment premise, Dhanidina and Griffith (1975) suggested that adults' participation in educational activities can be explained in terms of investment in one's human capital (Scanlan, 1986). Thus, participation/nonparticipation is directed by the value that individuals place on the cost and the potential benefits of the educational opportunity. When the perceived benefits (e.g., job promotion, acquisition of new knowledge, an increase in salary) outweigh the costs (e.g., tuition, time, and transportation), participation is likely to occur.

Dispositional Model of Participation

Whereas the early explanatory models of participation discussed above centered on social and economical factors, dispositional paradigms examine individuals' psychological orientations (attitudes) toward educational participation.

Seaman and Schroeder (1970) were the first to incorporate attitudes within a research framework to explain participatory behavior. Seaman and Schroeder conceptualized attitudes as having cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. In turn, the components of the attitude structure interact with situational cues to determine behavior. However, after age and educational level were factored out, a test of Seaman and Schroeder's model did not reveal a significant relationship between a positive attitude toward education and educational activity (Scanlan, 1986).

Also in an attempt to explain participatory behavior from a conceptual framework that focused on the dispositional or attitudinal component of behavior towards participation, Grotelueschen and Caulley (1977) identified three constructs as precedents to participation: (a) an individual's attitude toward participation, (b) an individual's perception of the expectations of others toward his or her behavior, and (c) the expectations that an individual imposes upon himself or herself. Grotelueschen and Caulley referred to the latter two constructs as the *subjective social norm* and the *subjective personal norm,* respectively. Subsequent tests of Grotelueschen and Caulley's model led researchers to conclude that the constructs could not be validated because of the discrepancies between an individual's intentions to participate and his or her actual behavior (Ray, 1979).

In the Conceptual Definitions section I described how transitions impact adults' decision-making process toward participation in learning activities. Likewise, in the Explanatory Models of Participation section the research literature highlighted the positive effect of changes in life circumstances on adult participation (Knox & Videbeck, 1963). Research by Aslanian and Brickell (1980) confirmed the close relationship between life changes and participatory behavior. However, as Merriam and Caffarella (1999) noted, the act of participation/nonparticipation involves a complex set of action/inaction by an individual based on different factors and variables. In fact, Courtney (1992) suggested that researchers devise frameworks that encompass multiple perspectives and account for as many factors associated with motivation as possible.

One example is Cross's (1981) COR Model of participation. Designed to add to the knowledge base on nontraditional students' participation in

postsecondary educational activities by accounting for multiple variables, this model is reviewed below.

Composite Model of Participation

Composite models of education participation encompass dispositional, situational, and environmental factors to explain the phenomenon of educational participation (Scanlan, 1986). As opposed to linear models of participation by Miller (1967) and Boshier (1971), which focus on a hierarchy of needs, Cross's (1981) COR Model can be viewed as more holistic and reciprocal. That is to say, the COR model attempts to account for as many factors associated with motivation as possible. In turn, these factors or links can positively or negatively affect an individual's progression toward participation, based upon the evaluation of the position of the individual in his or her environment (Scanlan, 1986). Figure 7 depicts what Cross (1981) referred to as five links to adult participation in a learning activity: (a) self-evaluation, (b) attitudes, (c) importance of goals and expectations, (d) life transitions, and (e) information. Cross suggested that, as a prospective student successfully progresses through these five links, he or she is able to confront and overcome obstacles and barriers that would otherwise impede participation.

The COR model begins with individual self-evaluation about personal ability. According to Cross (1981), self-confidence directly relates to individual assessment in part A of the model. In turn, positive, negative, or indifferent attitudes toward adult education in general impact the second link, or part B, of the model.

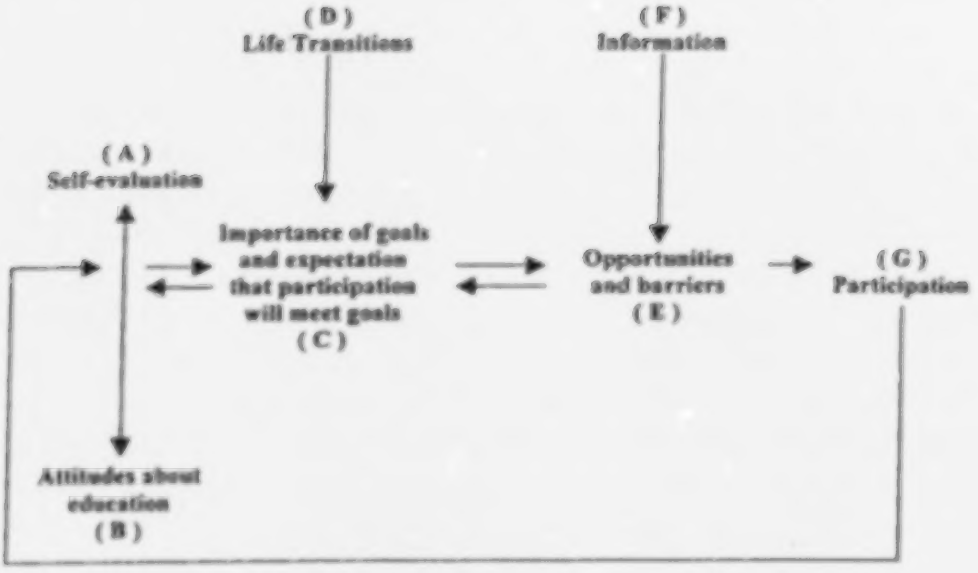

Figure 7. Cross's Chain-of-Response Model. Source: *Adults as Learners: Increasing Participation and Facilitating Learning*, by K. P. Cross, 1981, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Therefore, a positive self-evaluation (part A) and a positive attitude about education in general (part B) result in high expectation levels that participation will meet goals (part C). However, because this third link takes into account the importance of individual goals and the expectation that these goals will be met by the learning activity, positive assessments at links A and B do not always lead to participation. For example, an adult who values learning activities for pragmatic reasons (learning a specific skill or trade) may not participate if the only opportunities are liberal arts offerings. Similar to expectancy valence theory (Rubenson, 1977), this link has two components: the importance of the goal to the learner and the learner's belief about whether obtaining the goal will lead to reward (Scanlan, 1986).

In the Conceptual Definitions section I explained how life events as transitions impact adult learners' attitudes and motivations toward college participation. Because Cross's model is the first to incorporate this factor in explaining participatory/nonparticipatory behavior of adult learners, the fourth link of the model (part D) directly relates to the decision-making process of the third link. For example, life changes account for 83% of the motivation to participate in adult education (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980). Havighurst (1972) also viewed life transitions as positive forces for learning. Schlossberg et al. (1995) defined a transition as "any event, or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 27). Havighurst suggested that these alterations in daily life become an impetus for learning or the "teachable moment" (Evans et al., 1998).

The fourth and fifth links of the COR model are interconnected. One assumption by Cross is that, if an individual is motivated to participate in some

form of learning activity, barriers can be overcome (part E) if sufficient information (part F) exists about the types of opportunities that are available.

In summary, Cross's COR Model was the first to incorporate the Life Transition Theory of Schlossberg et al. (1995) described in the Adult Learners in Transition section. The COR Model highlights that participation in educational opportunities for adult learners is affected by various factors. Whether or not individuals are able to overcome perceived barriers and obstacles to participation is contingent upon the simultaneous and positive assessment of different parts of the model.

As elaborated in chapter 3, this study was designed to identify senior non-commissioned officers' beliefs about themselves as learners (first link) and their attitudes about postsecondary education in general (second link). In addition, this study's design allowed for data that revealed individuals' goals and expectations toward college participation (third link) when nearing a life transition (fourth link). Finally, because the research method for this study was a case study of senior enlisted soldiers at one Army installation, data about the types of information available to soldiers (fifth link) was collected to determine its impact on participants/ nonparticipants' abilities to overcome perceived obstacles and barriers.

Variables Associated With Participatory Behavior

In chapter 1 I outlined the format of the study's individual interviews. As I will elaborate in chapter 3, soldiers responded to 18 specific questions related to individual demographic characteristics and nondemographic attributes. Questions about demographic variables include probes about individual characteristics such as age, gender, and educational attainment. Questions about nondemographic

variables include both dispositional and situational considerations. Dispositional variables include individuals' values, opinions, attitudes, and beliefs about post-secondary education. Situational variables are attributes that reflect the career or life circumstances of individuals, including lack of time, lack of money, and lack of transportation (Cross, 1981).

For example, interviewees were asked to state their age, race, marital status, and parents' highest level of educational attainment (demographic factors). Interview questions related to nondemographic factors included (a) probes about interviewees' current life and career status (situational factors), (b) questions to learn about attitudes toward higher education in general, and (c) inquiries into individuals' opinions and beliefs about how to enhance educational opportunities (dispositional factors). Below, I review the research that indicates to what degree demographic and nondemographic variables act as deterrents to participation.

Demographic Variables

Demographic variables are characteristics associated with a particular group or segment of the population. Thus, researchers categorize individual groups by characteristics such as age, race, gender, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment. The literature on the impact of demographic characteristics on participatory behavior reveals that the above variables by themselves do not correlate with the construct of deterrents to participation as defined in the Factors Affecting Participation section below. For example, Meinhardt's (1979) study revealed that none of the above demographic variables had a close association with adult participation. Johnstone and Rivera (1965) found that race was not a significant factor for

participation when the demographic variable of educational attainment was held constant.

In chapter 3 I outline how the data collected for this study were analyzed. I then explain how interviewees' responses were recorded on matrices depicting the different types of demographic variables described above. Because the literature suggests that nondemographic variables influence adult learners' participatory behavior, I compared responses from the demographic matrices to certain situational, dispositional, and psychological characteristics revealed by the study's participants. Below, I expand on the characteristics associated with nondemographic variables and its impact on participatory behavior.

Nondemographic Variables

Nondemographic variables include situational, dispositional, and psychological characteristics. Situational factors include current life and career circumstances, while dispositional factors are related to personal opinions, beliefs, and attitudes toward higher education in general. Psychological characteristics are associated with life or career changes (Cross, 1981).

While demographic variables alone do not support the construct of deterrents to participation, the literature confirms that demographic variables in conjunction with nondemographic variables can influence participatory behavior. Scanlan (1986) noted that certain situational, dispositional, and psychological (nondemographic) adult characteristics interact with individual (demographic) variables that serve as determinants for participation. For example, nondemographic variables associated with the phenomenon of participation are confounded

by variables such as race, gender, age, and the various degrees to which these demographic factors impact individual participatory behavior (Scanlan).

Factors Affecting Participation

One important aspect for improved participation rates of senior enlisted soldiers is for Army leaders and educational planners to have knowledge of the barrier and deterrent factors that impede participation. Beder (1990) defined barriers as factors that prevent otherwise motivated adults from participating against their will. A deterrent to participation is defined as a reason or a related group of reasons that contributes to an individual's decision not to pursue an educational opportunity (Scanlan, 1986).

For the most part, these terms have been used in the literature synonymously (Beder, 1990). As a result, the number and the types of deterrent/barrier factors assigned by researchers have varied. For example, Darkenwald and Valentine (1985) identified five deterrents to participation: (a) personal problems, (b) lack of confidence, (c) educational costs, (d) lack of interest in organized education, and (e) lack of interest in available courses. Martindale and Drake (1989) identified seven deterrents to participation for Air Force enlisted personnel: (a) lack of course relevance, (b) lack of confidence, (c) cost and time constraints, (d) lack of convenience, (e) lack of interest, (f) family problems, and (g) lack of encouragement.

As Scanlan (1986) noted, "Deterrents to participation is a multidimensional concept, subsuming several logical groupings of psychological, social, and environmental variables" (p. 35). Accordingly, a close examination of the literature

reveals that the various factors derived by researchers tend to fit within the eight deterrent categories suggested by Scanlan.

Deterrent Categories

The eight factors identified by Scanlan (1986) are (a) individual, family, or home-related problems; (b) cost concerns; (c) questionable worth, relevance, or quality of educational opportunities; (d) negative educational perceptions, including prior unfavorable experiences; (e) apathy or lack of motivation; (f) lack of self-confidence; (g) a general tendency toward nonaffiliation; and (h) incompatibilities of time and/or place. Implicit in Scanlan's synthesis of the literature about the above deterrent factors is the need for further research that incorporates groups of adult learners' unique demographic characteristics and life circumstances.

Motivational orientation models developed by Houle (1961), Sheffield (1964), Burgess (1971), and Boshier (1971) are helpful in conceptualizing the myriad reasons why adult learners participate. Similarly, typologies devised by Valentine and Darkenwald (1990) are helpful in understanding why adults do not participate. Barriers to participation theories by Johnstone and Rivera (1965) and Cross (1981) are also central to understanding nontraditional student participation. The research literature on adult learners as applied to enlisted soldiers' motivational and deterrent orientations are central to understanding the relationship of this group of nontraditional students' dispositions toward pursuing a postsecondary education. In addition, their ability to navigate barriers to participation when nearing a life transition is crucial to the development of strategies that alleviate such deterrents.

Motivation and Deterrent Research in Military Populations

Research on the motivational orientations of military personnel is limited to studies by Ripley (1976), Murphy (1977), Meinhardt (1979), Copeland, (1987), Boesel and Johnson (1988), Brown (1993), and Brauchle (1997). Because none of these studies applied Boshier's (1971) Education Participation Scale or Burgess's (1971) Reasons for Educational Participation instrument to the Army enlisted population, a clear synthesis of findings remains incomplete.

Boesel and Johnson's (1988) study of the Army's Tuition Assistance program confirmed earlier research findings by Murphy (1977) and Meinhardt (1979) about enlisted soldiers' motivation to engage in college courses. The primary motivations for particiaption were for pragmatic reasons such as job advancement and promotion. A more recent study by Brauchle (1997) also found career enhancement to be a primary factor for participation. Another factor for participation listed by Brauchle for this population was the presence of enhanced career opportunities after separation from the service. The latter motivation is directly related to the Life Transition Theory of Schlossberg et al. (1995) and Cross's (1981) COR Model. The transition theory and the COR Model suggest that senior enlisted soldiers' motivations for college participation are positively influenced by an upcoming career transition (Schlossberg et al.). In fact, Brown's (1993) study of Army enlisted personnel found that the first reason given for participation was "to get a better job after retirement"; this factor was listed ahead of other pragmatic reasons such as "to get promoted faster" and "to be able to earn more money" (p. 145).

However, a review of the literature suggests that the stated reasons for participation by enlisted soldiers fall within Houle's goal-oriented part of his three-

factor typology. Houle (1961) conceptualized goal-oriented learners as those who participate in educational opportunities as a means of accomplishing specific objectives. As opposed to learning a specific skill or subject matter, the second group of adult learners (activity-oriented learners) participate more for the activity itself. Categorized as learning-oriented learners, the third group of adult participants in Houle's three-factor typology seek knowledge for its own sake.

Martindale and Drake's (1989) application of Darkenwald and Valentine's (1985) Deterrents to Participation Scale to a population of Air Force enlisted personnel found a close association with six of the categories identified with Darkenwald and Valentine's survey instrument. One of the categories of this military population identified by Martindale and Drake was a Lack of Encouragement factor. This deterrent correlates to Murphy's (1977) findings in a study of both participants and nonparticipants of an Army field organization. After controlling for cost, assessibility, and educational attainment levels, Murphy found that the influence of a significant other greatly impacted individuals' perceptions of deterrents to participation. Murphy defined significant others as parents, teachers, role models, and supervisors who encourage soldiers to enroll in educational opportunities. Meinhardt (1979) added unit company commanders and first sergeants to the list of significant others who can have a positive impact on enlisted soldiers' decisions to participate.

Meinhardt's (1979) study of both participants and nonparticipants of an Army field organization found that almost half (46%) of those surveyed believed that the lack of institutional support from their chain of command was a major deterrent to participation. However, futher analysis of Meinhardt's study, along with Brown's (1993) study of an Army garrison organization, reveals that

perceptions about support varied dependent upon the degree to which units were classified as participative or nonparticipative. In both studies, participating soldiers viewed support from the chain of command more positively than nonparticipating soldiers. Likewise, soldiers from units categorized as participative also had more positive perceptions about leadership support than soldiers from nonparticipative units.

In summary, studies about enlisted soldiers' reasons for participation/nonparticipation in postsecondary education are limited. Even under the more encompassing literature on adult learners and nontraditional students, researchers disagree about which theory or model is the most advantageous for developing strategies that enhance participation for the subgroup of nontraditional students in this study. Below, I expand on the limitations of the literature reviewed in this chapter. The criticisms made against the existing theories, models, and perspectives provide the foundation for this study's research design described in chapter 3.

Limitations and Criticisms

Research instruments used to measure both motivational orientations and perceived barriers to college participation have focused on different populations and issues. As a result, studies that examine the attitudes of military personnel toward college participation lack a coherent synthesis of findings and recommendations. For example, research of military populations by Brauchle (1997) and Boesel and Johnson (1988) were limited in scope primarily to soldier retention concerns. Other studies in this area have focused on nonmilitary adult learners enrolled in various *noncredit* courses. Because such studies were limited to

participants, research efforts failed to capture the experiences and attitudes of nonparticipants. Only research by Murphy (1977), Meinhardt (1979), Boesel and Johnson (1988), and Brown (1993) addressed both participant and nonparticipant military populations in relation to *for-credit* college offerings.

Limitations also center on the samples utilized in the majority of the research discussed in this chapter. Cross (1981) questioned the validity of deterrent data collected by quantitative survey methods. Critics of such methodologies point to data collection procedures that lead to nonrandom sampling, social response bias, and sample attenuation (Scanlan, 1986). Nonrandom sampling occurs when potential research participants of a target population do not have an equal and independent chance of selection. In addition, the use of personality inventories often results in the tendency for individuals to present themselves favorably. Responses by individuals that do not reveal their true beliefs are said to be caused by social response bias. The unreliability of such measures results in the low correlation of variables or sample attenuation (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996).

Another limitation of the literature reviewed in this chapter is based on the types of research methods used to investigate the motivational and deterrent factors associated with adults' participation in postsecondary educational opportunities. For example, with the exception of Houle's (1961) qualitative work, motivational research efforts have been based on quantitative methods. Although Houle's 20-year-old case study provides a foundation for understanding adult learners' orientations toward participation, his three-factor typology remains uncontested. Instead of the identification or the refinement of Houle's motivational orientations of adults, researchers have, in essence, linked their findings back to his three categories of participation. Because his study was limited to 22 interviewees, the

motivational factors listed from his limited sample do not capture all of the variables associated with adult motivational theory.

Another criticism of research in this area is its reliance on survey questions constructed by the researchers themselves. Respondents are forced to choose a variable that may not be relevant to why they do/do not participate (Scanlan, 1986). One example is the work of Johnstone and Rivera (1965). The researchers devised a questionnaire that allowed only dichotomous responses. Johnstone and Rivera did not adequately explain how some data about deterrents to participation were chosen for analysis while other potential categories were discarded (Scanlan).

A final criticism relates to the limitations associated with cross-sectional surveys and longitude research studies. In addition to the problems of researcher bias with the use of survey questionnaires described above, these research methods are problematic because such designs measure cohorts from different generations with different circumstances. The demographic composition of college students has witnessed dramatic change in the past 50 years. While cross-sectional studies measure differences between generations, they fail to capture the various changes in individuals' life experiences. Thus, research findings are limited because this method does not provide descriptions or possible explanations for individual's future behavior (Cross, 1981).

Conclusion

A survey of the literature suggests that (a) numerous characteristics attributable to nontraditional students do not allow for a single adult learner categorization or profile, (b) various research methods result in various answers as to why someone does or does not participate in adult educational programs, and (c) the reasons

for participation and the factors that impede participation are varied and complex. The literature reviewed in this chapter contributes to this study because it highlights (a) the gaps in the literature about adult participation in general, (b) the areas for future research in military settings, and (c) the parts of the current literature that provided the foundation for this study's framework.

Research instruments used to measure both motivational orientations and perceived barriers to college participation have focused on various populations and issues. Different research perspectives have resulted in studies about soldiers' attitudes toward college participation that lack a coherent synthesis of findings and recommendations. Research by Brauchle (1997) and Boesel and Johnson (1988) was limited in scope primarily to soldier retention concerns. Only studies by Murphy (1977), Meinhardt (1979), and Brown (1993) addressed both participant and nonparticipant populations. None of the studies compared both the motivational and deterrent orientations of senior enlisted college participants/nonparticipants who were near a career transition.

Further research that incorporates multiple theories and perspectives is needed to understand (a) whether the select group of students interviewed for this study had qualitatively different circumstances and experiences when compared to other types of nontraditional students; (b) what, if any, characteristics are unique to senior Army noncommissioned officers who participate in educational offerings; and (c) the factors that impede higher education participation for senior enlisted soldiers nearing a career or life transition

The implications for soldiers, the Army's leadership, and researchers interested in why these nontraditional students do/do not participate in postsecondary educational opportunities are as follows: (a) We do not know to what extent

the current literature on nontraditional and adult learners applies to this group of students; (b) therefore, we do not know how to design and implement initiatives that enhance the military's educational support system across a servicemember's career. These assertions lead directly to the problem addressed by this study. The four research questions are:

1. *What are the characteristics of participating adult learners that differentiate them from nonparticipants?*

2. *How does the military setting affect the types of learning opportunities available or present barriers to participation for this specific population?*

3. *What is the gap between the stated educational policies and reality in the provision of formal learning opportunities for career soldiers in transition?*

4. *Who takes advantage of these opportunities, why do they do so, and how are these opportunities limited?*

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research design and methodology used to answer the research questions about senior enlisted soldiers' attitudes toward postsecondary educational opportunities. First, I discuss what considerations influenced the selection of the design and strategy used for this study. Next, I outline the research method. This section of chapter 3 includes a discussion about research procedures, data trustworthiness, data reliability and validity, data analysis, and ethical concerns. I then present the characteristics of the research site and the study's participants. The types of questions posed in the individual and focus group interviews are reviewed next. I conclude this chapter by restating how the study's research questions address areas about this topic that past research efforts have left unattended.

Research Design

The purpose of this section is to discuss the research design and strategy selected to answer the research questions about senior noncommissioned officers' reasons for participation/nonparticipation in formal educational opportunities. In addition, I describe how ethical concerns were addressed throughout the course of the study.

A Qualitative Case Study Approach

Various research methods about nontraditional students' attitudes and behaviors toward college participation result in various conclusions and recommendations (Cross, 1981). Likewise, numerous factors associated with a given

phenomenon require a researcher to clearly define the focus of inquiry. Accordingly, the focus of this study was to investigate senior Army enlisted soldiers' attitudes and behaviors toward higher education participation/nonparticipation when nearing a life transition.

Because the specific research questions in this study required soldiers to respond in terms of their personal beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes about college participation, I chose a qualitative case study research design. This approach captured the unique experiences associated with this subgroup of nontraditional students (Schwandt, 1979). The study's four research questions were:

1. *What are the characteristics of participating adult learners that differentiate them from nonparticipants?*

2. *How does the military setting affect the types of learning opportunities available or present barriers to participation for this specific population?*

3. *What is the gap between the stated educational policies and reality in the provision of formal learning opportunities for career soldiers in transition?*

4. *Who takes advantage of these opportunities, why do they do so, and how are these opportunities limited?*

In the Research Strategy section below, I explain what factors directed the selection of the study's target population. My aim was to understand the processes and events that positively and negatively impact senior enlisted soldiers' dispositions toward postsecondary educational opportunities. As noted in the review of the literature, what remained unclear is whether senior enlisted soldiers' unique circumstances affected this group of students' dispositions toward college in qualitatively different ways. Because this study involved interviewees describing

both past and present college experiences, I chose a qualitative case study research method to examine this phenomenon.

Qualitative research seeks a holistic account of a social phenomenon that involves both observations and in-depth interviews (Patton, 1982). Accordingly, the conceptual framework for this study involved multiple data collection methods. The purpose of the research encompassed both exploratory and explanatory aspects. Exploratory studies attempt to identify what is taking place within an organization, program, or social phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). For this study, research questions that were exploratory in nature focused on Fort Military's educational services and programs.

The aim of explanatory studies is to outline how particular beliefs, events, attitudes, and policies interact to both positively and negatively impact a phenomenon. For this study, explanatory research questions were developed to learn about the beliefs and attitudes of senior enlisted soldiers' toward postsecondary participation/nonparticipation. Answers to these questions afforded opportunities to learn how individuals' past and current college-going experiences, educational policies and directives, and other demographic/nondemographic factors shaped individual dispositions toward college (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

While case studies focus on the complexity and particularity of a single situation, one weakness of choosing this approach is that the findings do not allow for generalizations across sites and geographical areas (Stake, 1995). However, because a case study highlights what is occurring within a specific phenomenon, produces detailed descriptions, and provides for possible explanations (Gall et al., 1996), this approach was advantageous for gaining a better understanding of senior enlisted soldiers' reasons for participation in higher education that may have been

missed by other research methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). As elaborated in chapter 5, answers to these questions are important for program developers, educational service providers, and the Army's leadership in finding out what motivates career soldiers in transition to participate and identifying factors that deter participation.

Research Strategy

Researchers define and categorize nontraditional students in a number of ways. Similar to the literature on nontraditional students' motivational orientations and barriers to participation in postsecondary educational opportunities, numerous factors are involved in whether senior noncommissioned officers have taken a college course in the past 5 years.

For this study, I defined participants and nonparticipants as soldiers who had at least an Associate degree or commensurate credit hours. The participants/ nonparticipants were then categorized as those soldiers who had/had not taken a college course in the past 5 years and were/were not pursuing a Bachelor degree. Figure 1 details four additional factors (type of job/unit assignment, postsecondary education level, parents' highest level of education, and time in service) that directed sampling procedures. The factors listed for the target population were common characteristics for participants and nonparticipants.

At Fort Military, a total of 860 staff sergeants (E-6) and above had 15 or more years of service. The numbers of the above senior noncommissioned officers nearing retirement and facing a career transition and enrolled in college courses at the time of the study were as follows: 45 graduate level, 90 Bachelor level (participants), and 172 Associate level. Of the remaining 503 soldiers in the target

population, 138 (nonparticipants) had at least an Associate degree or commensurate credit hours and had not taken a college class in the past 5 years. Table 1 lists the above factors along with the number of participants/nonparticipants by race, gender, marital status, and type of unit. Table 1 depicts the above factors along with the number of participants/nonparticipants by race, gender, marital status, and type of unit assignment.

Inherent in the in-depth and personal nature of qualitative methods is that researchers address in the design of a study certain ethical considerations (Gall et al., 1996; Kvale, 1996; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). A discussion about the researcher's position in relation to the study exposes any potential bias that may exist. Both ethical concerns and the researcher's background have important implications for qualitative research methods. Below, I address ethical considerations associated with this study. In the section that immediately follows I outline my background as it relates to senior enlisted Army soldiers' dispositions toward college participation/nonparticipation when nearing a career transition.

Ethical Issues

Christians (2000) suggested that researchers are guided by four criteria in guarding against ethical conflicts: (a) informed consent, (b) deception, (c) privacy and confidentiality, and (d) accuracy. Information about the type and intended use of research data along with conditions of participation is known as informed consent (Gall et al., 1996). Appendix A shows the consent letter that soldiers who agreed to participate in this study signed and returned at the initial briefing. Also at this time, soldiers in the target population were administered an educational survey

(appendix B). This document was compared to the individual's educational records to verify self-reports of time in service, educational attainment levels, and other demographic/nondemographic variables.

Deception involves the manipulation of research participants to investigate certain phenomena. For example, research is conducted with the use of deception when natural occurrences of the subject or situation are unlikely to occur (Gall et al., 1996). For this study, I did not intentionally create false impressions or withhold information from participants. Any deviations from the focus group and individual interviews (appendices C, D, E, and F) are addressed in the Interview Questions section of this chapter.

At the start of the study, privacy and confidentiality concerns were addressed by informing the research participants concerning who would have access to the data. Appendix A details the privacy and confidentiality information that was provided to the soldiers in the target population. For this study, once the research information was collected, I retained sole access to the data. In addition, I protected the privacy of individuals and Army facilities when the data referred to specific individuals and organizations (Gall et al., 1996).

The fourth criterion, data accuracy, requires that the researcher verify that his/her presentation of the data is accurate. This includes a discussion about data trustworthiness, reliability, and validity (Christians, 2000). I discuss how I met the data accuracy criteria in the Data Trustworthiness and Data Reliability and Validity sections of this chapter.

My roles in this study were as (a) an interviewer, (b) an observer, and (c) a reviewer of educational records and documents. I limited my interactions with the participants in this study to the initial mass briefing, the individual and focus group

interviews, and personal observations of the education center's counseling sessions. During the interviews, some participants reported specific individuals who were viewed as either facilitators or barriers to college participation. In all cases, I altered the names on the recorded transcripts in order to keep the information confidential. Similarly, in order to preserve confidentiality in presenting the data, I have referred to the research site by a pseudonym (Fort Military). In addition, I have avoided in the Installation Characteristics section of this chapter the identification of the specific college institutions available to soldiers and the geographical location of Fort Military in order to protect individual and organizational privacy concerns.

At present, I am not aware of any ethical violations or concerns on behalf of those interviewed that surfaced as a result of my conduct during the course of this study. I was not confronted by those whom I interviewed or observed concerning ethical dilemmas about whether to report or retract immoral or illegal behavior (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

Researcher's Background

How a researcher comes to know about a phenomenon is closely related to his or her choice of methods (Gall et al., 1996). Likewise, my analysis of the data in chapter 4 was formed by my personal life experiences and insights. As a senior noncommissioned officer nearing a career transition, I have experienced both enhanced educational opportunities and barriers to college participation. To be sure, my own life experiences informed my research perspective and framed the assumptions underlying the types of research questions posed (Gergen & Gergen, 2000). However, as Denzin (1989) recognized, research is situated by the

researcher's and participants' individual prejudices and life experiences. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted, "A text that displays honesty or authenticity comes clean about its stance and about the position of the author" (p. 280).

Research Method

The purpose of this section is to describe the specific research method implemented in the study. First, I outline the procedures used for the study. Next, I discuss data trustworthiness, data reliability and validity, data analysis, and the presentation of the data. I then present the characteristics of the study's participants by race, gender, marital status, type of unit, and college participatory status. Finally, I explain the interview guide used for both the individual and focus group interviews.

Procedures

A consent form (appendix A) was administered to participants of both the individual and focus group interviews. Included in appendix A was a description of the research project. I wrote to Fort Military's Chief of Educational Services to explain the concept of the study. In addition to providing me with the number of soldiers at Fort Military with the characteristics described in the Soldiers' Characteristics section, the Chief Education Counselor served as a contact person for the scheduling of interviews, observation of counseling sessions, and education records reviews. Prior to the collection of data, the installation's Judge Advocate General's Office reviewed and adjudicated the appendices related to human subjects. I then received from Fort Military's Garrison Commander authorization to conduct the study.

After listing in alphabetical order the educational records of the 90 sergeants currently pursuing a Bachelor degree, I selected every third record for 25 individual participant interviews. For the selection of nonparticipant individual interviews, I listed the educational records of the 138 sergeants who were not currently pursuing a Bachelor degree in alphabetical order. Then I selected every fifth record for inclusion in the study. I then compared the factors listed in Table 1 of those selected for participants individual interviews with those selected for non-participants individual interviews to ensure that a proportional representation existed for both groups. I then used the same sampling procedures for the focus group interviews.

I interviewed 92 soldiers over a 4-week period from January 14 to February 8, 2002. Also during this timeframe, I observed 15 interactions between senior enlisted soldiers and Fort Military's educational services staff. At the beginning of both individual and focus group interviews, I described the purpose of the research project. Because soldiers had already signed the consent form at the initial mass briefing conducted on January 3, 2002, I asked, prior to the start of each focus group and individual interview, if anyone no longer desired to participate. I then recorded the interviews, using separate tapes for each individual and focus group interview. Individual interviews ranged in duration from 30 to 45 minutes. The focus group interviews averaged 60 minutes in length.

Above, I identified the factors that directed the selection of the study's target population. Next, I outlined the study's sampling procedures. Below, I explain my rationale for choosing these factors and this group of nontraditional students. The numbers of participants/nonparticipants who met the selected criteria

identified in Figure 1 are listed in Table 1. Table 3 lists the actual numbers of soldiers interviewed for the individual and focus group interviews.

Data Collection

Various instruments may be used for data collection in a case study (Kvale, 1996), including note taking, observation, and recorded individual and focus group interviews. Focus groups and individual interviews rely upon responses of both structured and open-ended questions. The data from tape recordings and transcriptions of the interviews are coded into groups/subgroups that reflect various themes relating to the study's research questions (Kvale). Qualitative researchers clearly describe their methods of data collection in order to address validity concerns. Similarly, qualitative texts include a discussion about procedures for data analysis.

Known as triangulation, a multimethod approach to qualitative research ensures that the data are trustworthy. For this study I used five methods for data collection: (a) questionnaire (survey), records and documents analyses (policy letters/directives and operating procedures), interviews (recorded), focus groups (recorded), and observation (field notes). Below, I elaborate on the procedures for these data collection methods.

Questionnaire

First, I administered an initial education questionnaire (appendix B) to sergeants in the target population. The survey included questions about reasons for college participation and perceived barriers to participation. I reviewed the demographic/nondemographic data provided to determine whether the participants met the established criteria outlined in the Research Strategy section (Figure 1).

Table 3

Profiles of Soldiers Selected for Individual/Focus Group Interviews

Ethnicity and gender	Participants				Nonparticipants			
	Married	Single	Field unit	Garrison unit	Married	Single	Field unit	Garrison unit
Asian female	1 1[a]	0	1	1[a]	1	0	1	0
Black female	1	1 1[a]	1[a]	2	1 1[a]	1	2	1[a]
Hispanic female	1	0	0	1	1	1[a]	1 1[a]	0
Native American female	0	0	0	0	0	1[a]	0	1[a]
White female	10 6[a]	1[a]	5	7	6 4[a]	1 2[a]	3 4[a]	4 2[a]
Asian male	1	0	1	0	2 1[a]	0 0	1 1[a]	1
Black male	2 2[a]	1	3	2[a]	2 2[a]	1	1	2 2[a]
Hispanic male	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Native American male	1 1[a]	0	0	1 1[a]	1	0	0	1
White male	6 9[a]	1[a]	3 6[a]	3 4[a]	6 8[a]	1	5 3[a]	2 5[a]
Totals	23 19[a]	2 3[a]	12 9[a]	13 13[a]	21 16[a]	4 4[a]	15 9[a]	10 11[a]

[a]Represents the actual number of participants/nonparticipants of focus group interviews; other numbers represent the number of participants/nonparticipants of individual interviews.

Records and Documents

Second, I collected 10 records and documents relating to educational opportunities at Fort Military. Sources of data included the Department of Defense's directives on educational opportunities in Army Regulation 621-5 (USDA, 1993), the installation's current education policy letters, and the education center's written procedures for soldier in-processing and counseling services. My rationale for including this method of data collection was to gain insight into whether a gap existed between the stated educational policies and the reality in the provision of formal learning opportunities for senior enlisted adult learners.

Interviews

Third, I conducted 25 semistructured individual interviews for participants and 25 individual interviews for nonparticipants. In addition to the research questions, I posed follow-up questions to interviewees in order to seek clarification and gain a greater understanding of their responses. For this study, all interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data from the interviews were coded into categories that addressed the study's research questions.

Focus Groups

Fourth, I conducted five focus groups composed of a total of 42 individuals. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data from the interviews were coded into categories that reflected themes relating to reasons for participation and factors that impeded participation. The groupings of the focus groups were separate for participants and nonparticipants in order for the interviewees to express their personal reasons for not participating more readily. In summary, both the

focus groups and the individual interviews relied upon responses to specific and open-ended questions (Kvale, 1996). I coded the data from the tape recordings and transcriptions into groups/subgroups that reflected themes about the research questions.

Observation

A study's participants may not always behave in the manner that they indicate during structured interviews (Bailey, 1994). Observations, along with review of documents, were helpful in verifying or questioning the interview data. For example, when considering a nontraditional student's decision-making process toward college participation, one factor is the availability of information about educational opportunities (Cross, 1981). Accordingly, I observed the education center's processing and counseling procedures for senior enlisted soldiers. I annotated on a protocol worksheet (appendix G) field notes of key observations, events requiring further investigation/corroboration, and tentative conclusions. This strategy assisted in verifying and questioning the data collected via the other methods.

Data Trustworthiness

Qualitative studies with findings that contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon and improve the circumstances of the participants are considered trustworthy (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) indicated, "The use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomena in question. [It] is not a tool or a strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation" (p. 2).

The multimethod data collection approach outlined above ensured that the final presentation of the data in chapter 4 is trustworthy. For example, I afforded 10 participants the opportunity to review, clarify, and amend their statements and my interpretations/conceptual categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Second, I verified individual self-reports with educational records in order to validate education levels, time in service, and type of unit assignment. Third, I compared the installation's stated educational opportunities and services with actual course offerings and counseling sessions. Fourth, I achieved trustworthiness by demonstrating that my research questions were the basis of the described methodology.

As elaborated in the Interview Questions section of this chapter, this study's questions were derived from my concerns that this group of nontraditional students' college-going experiences might be qualitatively different from those of the types of students from which current theories and models were developed. Finally, I thoroughly explain in this chapter what, if any, tradeoffs were made during the course of the study (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992; Rossman & Rallis, 1998). This includes the above discussion about ethical issues that may have surfaced during the research project. In addition, trustworthiness is achieved by thoroughly explaining how my background may have affected research bias concerns.

All researchers using qualitative methods interpret their data from a particular perspective, standpoint, and situation. A study's design (site selection, data collection methods, and data analysis) is influenced by the researcher's understanding and construction of knowledge (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). In chapter 2 I outlined some of the criticisms made against past research methods and designs. Regardless of the type of research design, both quantitative and qualitative methods have potential data collection and data analysis shortcomings.

For example, individuals' responses to survey questionnaires and personality inventories can result in research findings with a social response bias. The tendency for individuals to present themselves favorably is also present in qualitative data collection methods such as interviews and focus groups (Bailey, 1994). In order to lessen the possibility that interviewees' answers were merely what they believed I wanted to hear, I employed several strategies to ensure that the data were trustworthy.

First, throughout the individual and focus group interviews, I used the techniques of parroting, paraphrasing, and clarifying. In parroting, the interviewer repeats verbatim the respondent's statement. Paraphrasing is a summary of ideas or a concise restatement of what has been presented. Clarifying involves asking participants for additional information and explanations (Berko, Wolvin, & Wolvin, 1989). All of these techniques allowed me to determine whether I understood the message and to gain a better understanding of what was said. In addition to the interview questions listed in appendices C, D, E, and F, I posed the following probes to respondents:

- Could you be more specific?
- What else?
- Would you say more about that?
- Who else had the same experience?
- What does that help explain?
- How does this relate to other experiences?
- What do you associate with that?
- So what?
- How could you make it better?

- What would be the consequences of doing/not doing that?
- What changes would you make?
- What would you continue?
- What are the costs/benefits?
- If you had it to do over again, what would you do?

My role during the individual and focus group interviews was that of a facilitator. I remained neutral on all positions and did not interject my views during the discussions except to clarify individuals' responses. I used the above questions to gain a better understanding of soldiers' feelings about the research questions.

While my position as a senior noncommissioned officer might have stifled lower enlisted soldiers' willingness to engage in a candid discussion about the research topic, this possibility was lessened by the fact that those interviewed were of similar military rank. Because the participants were already aware of my military status, I decided that my selection of similar attire would negate possible superficial chasms between the interviewer and the interviewee. Accordingly, for all interviews I wore the same Battle Dress Uniform as those who participated in the individual and focus group interviews.

The final issue that is central to data trustworthiness concerns the accurate interpretation of statements, documents, and observations. Researchers who have close association with a particular subject are able to render a more accurate account of what is taking place. This awareness includes the researcher's understanding of a particular culture, language, and group of individuals (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Manning, 1987). The fact that I was similar in background to the interviewed soldiers lessened the potential danger that I would not interpret the data correctly. For example, the individual and focus group interviews included

dialogues that were laden with military jargon and acronyms. My background as a senior noncommissioned officer with over 18 years of active duty experience was helpful in understanding the meanings of soldiers' responses.

In addition to explanations about a research study's trustworthiness, the reader must deem the text to be reliable, valid, and ethical (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Qualitative studies void of any discussion about validity and reliability considerations are often viewed as lacking rigor or quality. Rigor is defined as judging the appropriateness of the study's methodology in generating findings (Rossman & Rallis).

Data Reliability and Validity

As Gitlin (1990) noted, "Reliability is understood in terms of the ability of independent researchers to come to the same conclusions when the same procedures are used" (pp. 446-447). Similarly, external validity involves the collection of data from several research sites. This duplication of findings through the use of identical instruments and procedures is based on positivists' assumptions of an objective reality (Gall et al., 1996). However, Yin (1994) suggested that the sole criterion for case study reliability was "the extent to which other researchers would arrive at similar results if they studied the same case using exactly the same procedures as the first researcher" (p. 572). Therefore, traditional notions of reliability may not apply to case study findings, since such research is interpretive in nature, with meaning being constructed by the researcher and the researched in an ongoing or emergent manner (Gall et al., 1996).

Researchers using qualitative methods must also be sensitive to internal validity considerations in order for their research findings to be accurate and

trustworthy across different research perspectives. Internal validity involves the researcher accounting for the accuracy of his or her observations and instruments in relation to other variables at the research site (Gall et al., 1996). My background and experiences were similar to those of the study population. Thus, my presence as an observer and interviewer at Fort Military had a minimal impact on how participants behaved during the course of this case study (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982).

Tierney and Rhoads (1993) outlined tests of data reliability and validity to include the following: (a) Are participants' voices believable? (b) is the situation reasonable? (c) has the author/researcher sufficiently explained how he or she is situated within the research/text and are alternative interpretations offered? and (d) does the text offer the reader opportunities for self-reflection on his or her own life and work experiences? For this study, I used a standardized interview format in which individual soldiers were asked the same questions in the same order. This strategy enhanced data reliability because the same instruments and procedures were used throughout the course of the study.

I have described how researchers achieve trustworthy findings. In addition to a clear description of the methods of data collection, qualitative researchers address reliability and validity concerns. Qualitative texts also include a discussion about procedures for data analysis and presentation.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Data analysis in qualitative research involves the observed and the observer interpreting reality (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Denzin (1994) stated, "Interpretation is an art; it is not formulaic or mechanical" (p. 502). The primary analytical tool

for qualitative researchers integrating sites, sounds, dialogue, voice inflections, and numerous other subtleties is the researcher himself or herself. The researcher's analysis of the data results in a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of participants' worldviews that provides the reader with a vicarious experience (Rossman & Rallis, 1998; Stake, 1995). This sense of "being there" adds validity and trustworthiness to a study's findings.

As Stake (1995) noted, "The best research questions evolve during the study" (p. 33). Accordingly, questions and theories are revised as patterns emerge from the data (Rosaldo, 1989). The researcher sharing the findings with the study's participants about statements and their significance is known as member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ultimately, analysis of the data and the final product are guided by questions concerning validity, reliability, and trustworthiness. By asking these questions during data analysis, the researcher's aim is to provide the reader with the author's (etic) perspective and the participants' (emic) perspective (Rossman & Rallis, 1998; Stake).

However, not all qualitative researchers concern themselves with issues relating to reliability and validity. Because qualitative inquirers approach research problems from different perspectives and epistemological orientations, "qualitative research does not pretend to be replicable" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 146). In fact, qualitative research's focus "is not to generalize across contexts but rather to come to terms with specific situations" (Tierney, 1991, p. 19).

I developed matrices to record participants and nonparticipants' answers to the questions that were posed during the individual and focus groups interviews. After transcription of the interviews, I annotated interviewees' stated reasons (e.g., "to get a credential," "to prepare for retirement," "to get promoted") for

participation/nonparticipation by noting key terms and phrases. Figure 8 depicts 1 of 10 matrices used to record the motivational orientations by race, gender, marital status, participation status, and type of unit assignment. An additional 10 matrices were used to record deterrent orientations by the same factors listed in Table 3.

Figure 9 is an example of the two matrices used to record the motivational and deterrent orientations of interviewees by gender, participation status, and first-generation status. I developed this matrix to delineate what, if any, differences were present between the categories identified in Figure 8 and aspects of first-generation participants/nonparticipants. While noting the differences by race and gender, I subsumed the reasons listed in Figure 8 with the motivational and deterrent orientations identified in Figure 9.

Figure 10 depicts the matrix used to note reasons for participation/nonparticipation by gender. While noting the differences identified by the variables listed in the charts, I combined interviewees' stated reasons, where appropriate.

In chapter 4 I present the data collected from the research method described in this chapter. As noted in chapter 2, reasons for participation and perceived barriers to participation can be viewed from certain perspectives or taxonomies. Accordingly, in the presentation of the data I start with a discussion about the subjects' stated reasons for participation/nonparticipation in postsecondary educational opportunities.

As depicted in Figure 11, when appropriate, themes or conceptual categories identified in the above matrices were subsumed to a matrix of interviewees' motivational and deterrent orientation by participatory status. I outline in chapter 4 the degree to which senior enlisted soldiers' reasons for participation/nonparticipation "fit" within the established taxonomies covered in chapter 3.

	MOTIVATIONAL ORIENTATIONS BY RACE, GENDER, PARTICIPATION STATUS, MARITAL STATUS, AND TYPE OF UNIT		
	FIRST REASON	*SECOND REASON*	*THIRD REASON*
White Female Participant Married Field			
White Female Participant Single Field			
White Female Participant Married Garrison			
White Female Participant Single Garrison			
White Female Nonparticipant Married Field			
White Female Nonparticipant Single Field			
White Female Nonparticipant Married Garrison			
White Female Nonparticipant Single Garrison			

Figure 8. Sample matrix: motivational orientations by race, gender, participation status, marital status, and type of unit.

	MOTIVATIONAL ORIENTATIONS BY GENDER, PARTICIPATION STATUS AND ASPECTS OF FIRST-GENERATION		
	FIRST REASON	*SECOND REASON*	*THIRD REASON*
Female Participant First Generation			
Female Participant Non-First Generation			
Female Nonparticipant First Generation			
Female Nonparticipant Non-First Generation			
Male Participant First Generation			
Male Participant Non-First Generation			
Male Nonparticipant First Generation			
Male Nonparticipant Non-First Generation			

Figure 9. Sample matrix: motivational orientations by gender, participation status and aspects of first-generation students.

	MOTIVATIONAL ORIENTATIONS BY GENDER AND PARTICIPATION STATUS		
	FIRST REASON	*SECOND REASON*	*THIRD REASON*
Female Participants			
Female Nonparticipants			
Male Participants			
Male Nonparticipants			

Figure 10. Sample matrix: motivational orientations by gender and participation status.

	MOTIVATIONAL ORIENTATIONS BY PARTICIPATION STATUS		
	FIRST REASON	*SECOND REASON*	*THIRD REASON*
Participants			
Nonparticipants			

Figure 11. Sample matrix: motivational orientations by participation status.

In addition, I highlight the differences between this subgroup of nontraditional students and other adult learners by the factors listed in the above matrices. I develop how the reasons provided by the study's participants apply to Cross's (1981) COR Model and the degree to which the Life Transitions theory of Schlossberg et al. (1995) affects participatory/nonparticipatory behavior of senior enlisted Army soldiers.

Below I list the number of soldiers at Fort Military who were in the study's target population by race, gender, participatory status, type of unit assignment, and marital status. Table 3 depicts the actual number of soldiers interviewed for both the individual and focus group interviews by the above factors.

Target Population's Characteristics

Job/Unit Assignment

In addition to individuals' motivational orientations, another variable that affects participation/nonparticipation is the collection of characteristics associated with different MOSs. Some MOSs are assigned to field units where training exercises and deployments are common and work hours are unpredictable. Other soldiers have MOSs that assigns them to garrison units. These types of units are characterized as having predictable work hours with few deployments or field training exercises. Dependent upon a soldier's MOS, having the opportunity to participate in college courses during off-duty time is abundant for some, while others must confront additional barriers and obstacles to participation.

For this study, 92 soldiers in the target population participated in the individual and focus group interviews. The individual interviews totaled 50 soldiers, and 42 soldiers participated in the focus group interviews. Specifically, 12 participants

and 15 nonparticipants assigned to field units took part in the individual interviews. A total of 13 participants and 10 nonparticipants assigned to garrison units participated in the individual interviews. As shown in Table 3, a total of 9 participants and 9 nonparticipants assigned to field units took part in the focus group interviews. A total of 13 participants and 11 nonparticipants assigned to garrison units took part in the focus group interviews.

Postsecondary Education Level

The second factor that influences whether senior noncommissioned officers participate in postsecondary educational opportunities is current education level. For example, one consideration for advancement or promotion for enlisted soldiers is their civilian education level. The SOC Associate Degree Program allows soldiers to have their military training and experience evaluated for college credit after taking three courses or nine semester hours with an accredited college or university. Accordingly, a majority of senior noncommissioned officers take some college courses during their careers. However, the Army's enlisted promotion system awards only up to 100 points or 100 semester hours. One assumption is that soldiers' motivation for pursuing postsecondary educational opportunities may change as they near completion of an Associate degree.

A total of 90 soldiers in the target population were defined as participants. Participants/nonparticipants were then categorized as those soldiers who had/had not taken a college course in the past 5 years and were/were not pursuing a Bachelor degree. At Fort Military, 138 soldiers were nonparticipants. Soldiers in the individual interviews consisted of 23 participants and 21 nonparticipants who were married and 2 participants and 4 nonparticipants who were single. As shown

in Table 3, for the focus group interviews, 19 participants and 16 nonparticipants were married. Three participants and 4 nonparticipants who were single participated in the focus group interviews.

Parents' Highest Level of Educational Attainment

The third consideration for this study's sample selection involved identifying senior noncommissioned officers who were first-generation students. On average, when compared to past generations of Army adult learners, today's senior noncommissioned officers possess higher levels of postsecondary education. Nevertheless, a majority of the enlisted force enters the service as a first-generation student (see chapter 1). My assumption was that this factor had a negative effect on some students' ability to overcome obstacles or deterrents to college participation.

At the same time, other soldiers from this population are able to acquire strategies that enable them to participate (see chapter 4). The data from this study partially confirm the literature on aspects of first-generation college students and the correlation between the acquisition of cultural capital and nontraditional students' participation/nonparticipation in postsecondary educational opportunities. The identification of interventions that facilitate participation for this subgroup of nontraditional students is outlined in chapter 5.

Time in Service

The fourth factor for sampling procedures is the servicemember's time in service. Enlisted soldiers are categorized as senior noncommissioned officers when they reach the rank of staff sergeant (promotable). Soldiers are eligible for retirement after 20 years of service. Because I considered the impact of Schlossberg et

al.'s (1995) concept of life transitions on this population's college decision-making processes, I selected participants who were senior noncommissioned officers (staff sergeants and above) who were nearing retirement (15 or more years of service).

Therefore, the sampling procedures for this study are intentionally sensitive to the factors identified in Figure 1 and Table 1. Table 3 lists the study's actual number of participants/nonparticipants by the demographic factors discussed above. I outline in the Installation Characteristics section the types of nondemographic variables present at Fort Military.

Characteristics of the Study's Participants

Installation Characteristics

Fort Military provided a wide variety of educational opportunities to meet servicemembers' various learning needs. The types of offerings included flexible college course schedules, counseling services, and instruction appropriate for different developmental levels. Postsecondary educational offerings ranged from a 2-year college (Carnegie Classification-AA) to a doctoral/research university-extensive (Carnegie Classification-DR Ext).

While I chose the research site based primarily on availability and convenience, other considerations included having access to the types of data sources needed to answer the research questions under study. Fort Military had a sufficient target population to gather information for data collection. For example, soldiers assigned to the installation held both tactical (field) and strategic (garrison) MOSs. Table 1 shows the number of participants/nonparticipants by demographic variables that were part of the study's target population. Table 3 identifies the number of soldiers in each category who actually participated in the individual and focus

group interviews. The education center at Fort Military was typical of other Army education centers in the types of counseling services available to soldiers. The director of the education center served as a gatekeeper in providing access to observing the center's in-processing procedures, counseling sessions, and the educational records reviews.

The Interview Questions

The interview questions for both participants (appendix C) and nonparticipants (appendix D) focused on four central categories: (a) individual history, (b) parents' history (aspects of first-generation students), (c) present (motivations/barriers/life transitions), and (d) policy. For the individual interviews, the characteristics of the target population were common to participants and nonparticipants. Therefore, the interview questions were the same, with two exceptions: Part III Questions 5 and 6 and Part IV Question 1).

The groupings of the focus group interviews were separate for participants and nonparticipants in order for the interviewees to express more readily their personal reasons for not participating. The focus group interview questions for both participants (appendix E) and nonparticipants (appendix F) focused on three central categories: (a) motivation, (b) barriers/deterrents, and (c) policy. With the exception of Part III in appendices E and F, the interview questions for participants/nonparticipants were different. For participants, the questions focused on identifying factors that influenced participation. For nonparticipants, the questions focused on factors that inhibited participation and possible interventions to facilitate participation.

Conclusion

I have discussed the salient issues involved in using a qualitative case study approach to examine college participation of the subgroup of nontraditional students identified in this chapter. After providing the rationale for why a case study was selected over other methods, I described how the data collection process and procedures for data analysis determined this study's validity, reliability, and data trustworthiness. I noted the importance of addressing ethical considerations as part of the research process. This included discussions about my own background and researcher bias.

The literature reviewed in chapter 2 regarding past research efforts suggests three possibilities: (a) in comparison to the current literature on nontraditional students, it was not known whether this select group of nontraditional students' circumstances and experiences were qualitatively different; (b) the unique characteristics of those senior Army noncommissioned officers who participate in educational offerings were not known; and (c) the factors that impede higher education participation for senior enlisted soldiers nearing a career or life transition were not known. Research of military populations by Brauchle (1997) and Boesel and Johnson (1988) were limited in scope primarily to soldier retention concerns. Other studies in this area have focused on nonmilitary adult learners enrolled in various noncredit courses. Because such studies were limited to participants, research efforts failed to capture the experiences and attitudes of nonparticipants. Only research by Murphy (1977), Meinhardt (1979), Boesel and Johnson, and Brown (1993) addressed both participant and nonparticipant military populations in relation to for-credit college offerings. No studies have compared senior enlisted soldiers' attitudes toward postsecondary educational opportunities when nearing a

career transition. In order to learn what specific factors either enhance or impede participation, I chose a qualitative case study research approach. I used multiple data collection methods to triangulate the research findings and limit research bias.

I interviewed 92 senior enlisted soldiers at one Army installation. While demographic variables alone do not support the construct of deterrents to participation, the literature reviewed in chapter 2 confirms that demographic variables act in conjunction with nondemographic variables to influence participatory behavior (Scanlan, 1986). Accordingly, I interviewed senior enlisted soldiers and collected data on both demographic variables (gender, race, marital status, and type of unit assignment) and nondemographic variables (career transition and dispositions toward college participation).

Recently, some researchers have questioned the utility of research findings for audiences other than academics. Rather than focusing on which research strategy is best for investigating a particular problem, Tierney (2000) suggested that researchers shift their energies to questioning how various research methods result in findings that assist those outside of academe. I used a qualitative approach in order to provide the participants, educational counselors, and organizational leaders involved in this study detailed descriptions of a complex phenomenon. Readers of this text may gain a more comprehensive understanding of senior enlisted soldiers' complex needs and circumstances. The data presented in chapter 4 answer the four research questions:

1. *What are the characteristics of participating adult learners that differentiate them from nonparticipants?*

2. *How does the military setting affect the types of learning opportunities available or present barriers to participation for this specific population?*

3. *What is the gap between the stated educational policies and reality in the provision of formal learning opportunities for career soldiers in transition?*

4. *Who takes advantage of these opportunities, why do they do so, and how are these opportunities limited?*

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

In this chapter I present the data that answer the research questions about senior enlisted soldiers' attitudes toward postsecondary educational opportunities. I provide an overview of how soldiers' answers to the questions posed in the individual and focus group interviews were coded and assigned to the study's conceptual categories. I list the interviewees' primary reasons for participation/nonparticipation in college and university offerings. The data from the interview protocols that accentuate the major themes related to soldiers' motivational orientations and perceived barriers to participation are compared with the established models and theories reviewed in chapter 2.

Because the basis for this study's research questions was to identify the specific demographic and nondemographic variables that influence participatory/nonparticipatory behavior, a synthesis of the data associated with first-generation college students and life transitions is presented next. Then I provide the data from the observations and document analysis portion of the study. This section is followed by interviewees' suggested interventions for enhanced educational opportunities. I conclude the chapter by listing the study's key findings in preparation for the implications and recommendations discussion in chapter 5.

Data Presentation

In chapter 1 I identified what issues about nontraditional students participation in postsecondary education remain problematic. I then reviewed past research efforts that addressed the research questions developed for this study to learn about a specific group of adult learners: senior noncommissioned officers nearing a life

transition. I recorded and coded all of the key terms/phrases from soldiers' responses on the matrices shown in chapter 3 in order to organize the data and assign the motivational/deterrent factors to conceptual categories about college participation/nonparticipation.

For the reader to understand what factors had the most impact on this subgroup of adult learners' decisions to participate/not participate in college, I discuss in the next four sections only the three primary factors that either enhanced or impeded soldiers' abilities to pursue postsecondary educational opportunities. Other factors of less significance have been combined and are represented in Figures 12 through 15 as the *Other* category.

This study's fourth research question was: ***Who takes advantage of these [postsecondary educational] opportunities, why do they do so,, and how are these opportunities [college offerings] limited?***

The answers to this question are covered in the next four sections. First, I outline the three primary factors that have the most impact on nonparticipants and participants' motivational orientations toward postsecondary educational opportunities. Next, I discuss the three primary reasons that nonparticipants and participants named as barriers to college participation.

Nonparticipants' Motivational Orientations and Factors That Influenced Participation

This section covers the three primary factors that nonparticipants rated as having a positive impact on past participation in college offerings. Embedded in this discussion is a synthesis of the specific demographic variables that interacted with certain nondemographic factors.

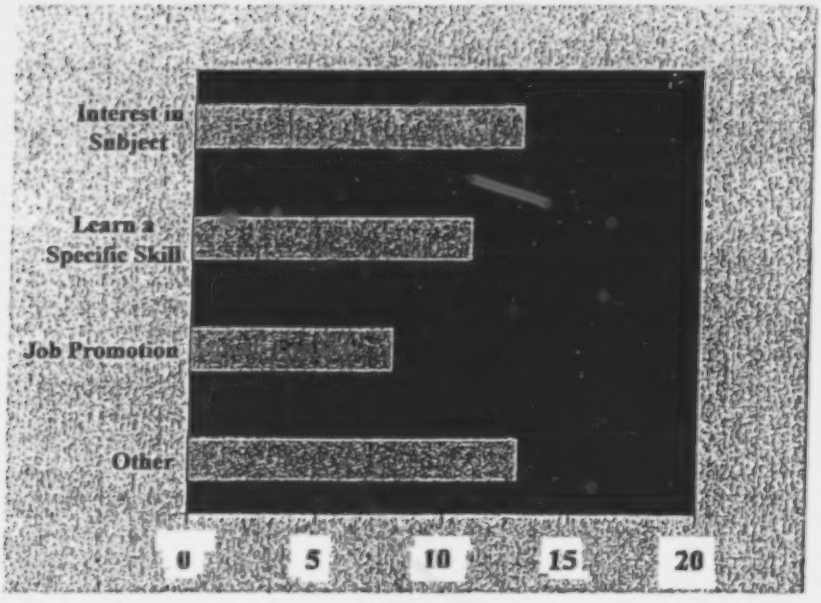

Figure 12. Motivational orientations of nonparticipants. The figure depicts the primary factors stated by nonparticipant interviewees ($N = 45$) that impacted their motivational orientations toward postsecondary educational participation.

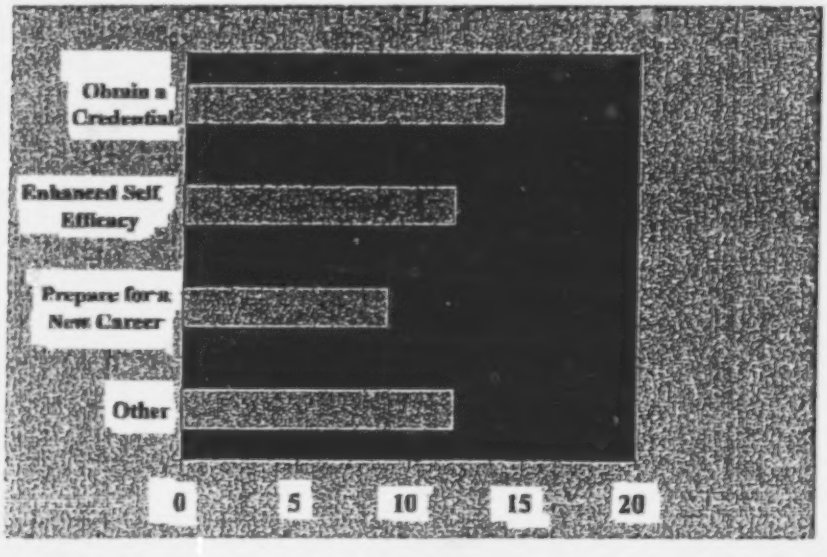

Figure 13. Motivational orientations of participants. The figure depicts the primary factors stated by the participant interviewees ($N = 47$) that impacted their motivational orientations toward postsecondary educational participation

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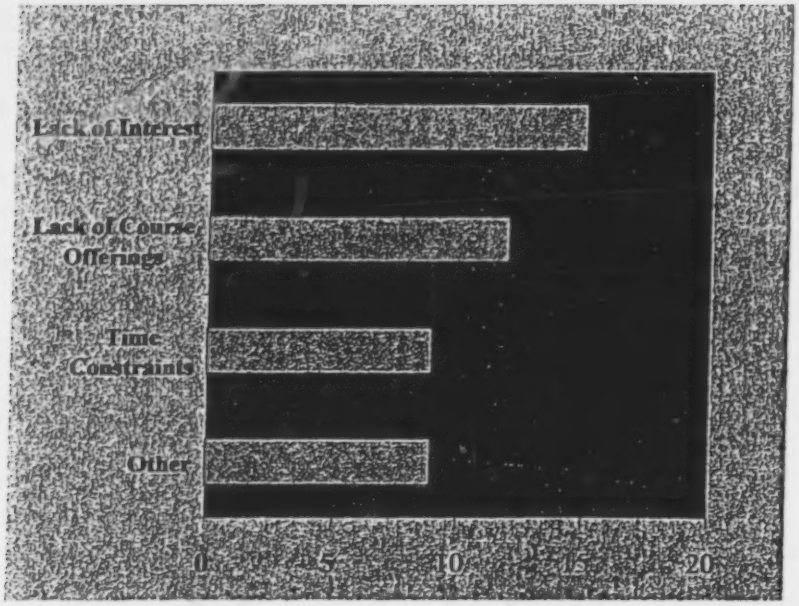

Figure 14. Deterrents/barriers to nonparticipants. The figure depicts the primary factors stated by nonparticipant interviewees ($N = 45$) that deterred their participation in postsecondary educational opportunities.

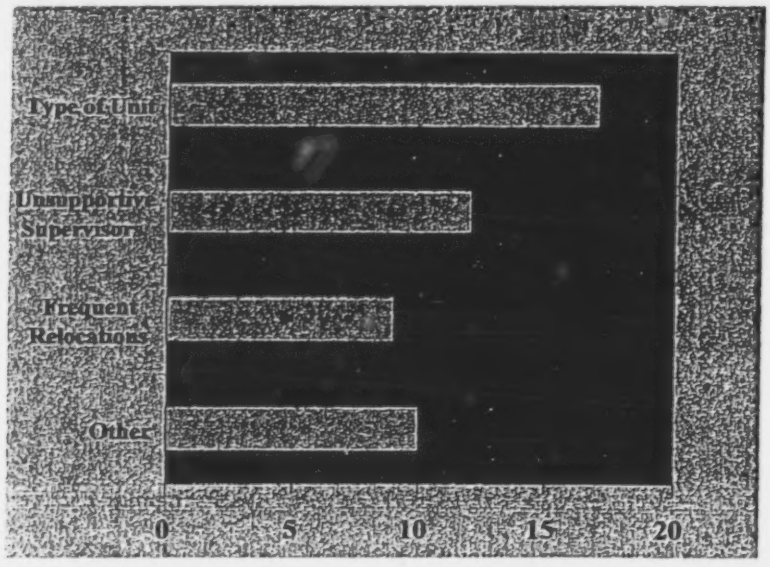

Figure 15. Deterrents/barriers to participants. The figure depicts the primary factors stated by participant interviewees ($N = 47$) that deterred their participation in postsecondary educational opportunities.

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The Interest in Subject Factor

Figure 12 illustrates that 13 nonparticipants from the individual and focus group interviews stated that an interest in a particular subject had a positive impact on past decisions to participate in postsecondary opportunities. The *Interest in Subject* factor is represented by remarks such as that of the sergeant first class below. Although he had accumulated over 90 credit hours of college credit, he had not taken a college course in the past 5 years. When asked what had motivated him to take college courses, he said,

> The first real obvious reason is that, if you ever looked at my transcripts and what I started taking, you would see that I took things that I was interested in. I signed up for courses in zoology and sociology just because I was interested in them at the time. I went down and just took classes I wanted, computer classes. I started a lot of computer classes. That was my first motivation and probably still is today. I also took history classes, even though I do not need it in my degree, just because of the love of history; and it was available.

Another sergeant first class said,

> I started out taking college classes for the promotion points. But because I knew that my military schooling and experience would be evaluated for college credit, the courses that I took were things that interested me. But I did have to take a couple of math and English courses to finish up my Associate [degree].

Another nonparticipant whose response was coded into the Interest in Subject category as a primary reason for college participation said,

> First and foremost, it would have to be interesting to me, something I would be interested in learning more about.

The Interest in Subject variable was both a deterrent and a motivating force for one sergeant first class. When asked what her main reasons for participating in postsecondary educational opportunities were, she said,

> The reason I haven't taken any college courses lately is because they won't let me take what I like. When I used to try and sign up for a course, the education counselor wouldn't sign off on my tuition assistance form because they would always say that the course I wanted to take wasn't necessary for my degree. I like to take art history courses because when I was in junior high and high school, I became interested in art. So I guess you could say I like art and things like that but, if I want to take those kinds of classes, I would have to pay for them myself. So that's the main reason.

A fifth soldier said,

> I only take courses that I like.

Another sergeant first class, who was a nonparticipant, said,

> If I'm gonna take a college class, it is going to be something that I enjoy and am interested in.

Another nonparticipant interviewee indicated that a personal interest in a particular subject directed his pursuit of college courses:

> For the most part, my main reason for taking college courses was when it was something that I thought might be interesting to learn more about. That's probably why I stopped going to school; I just don't find a lot of the courses that are offered here very interesting.

Likewise, another nonparticipant said,

> One of the reasons it took me over 10 years to finish my Associate [degree] is because I avoided the core courses that my college said I needed as part of the degree. For the longest, I would take classes in psychology and history because I was interested in these subjects and I kept avoiding the math and English courses I needed to finish my degree.

The Learn a Specific Skill Factor

The second factor that influenced whether nonparticipants elected to enroll in formal, for-credit college courses was the desire to *Learn a Specific Skill*. Eleven nonparticipants named this as a primary factor that influenced participation.

For example, numerous nonparticipants responded to the interview question about reasons for participation by stating sentiments similar to that of a master sergeant who had not taken a college course in the past 5 years:

> I have taken courses throughout my career when it was something that I wanted to get better at or know about. I work on my own vehicles, so I have taken college courses about auto mechanics. Another time, I took college wood-working courses because I have my own woodworking shop at home. Since my Associate's degree, I haven't taken any courses except to learn more about things that I might want to do once I retire.

A Black female sergeant first class, also categorized as a nonparticipant, explained that her plans after retirement did not require her to have a college degree. This soldier's motivation for participating in postsecondary educational opportunities was based on pragmatic reasons associated with learning a specific skill to manage her own business.

> I plan on opening my own business, once I retire next year. So one of the reasons I haven't taken any college courses in the past 5 years is that I didn't want to waste my time or money taking college courses I wasn't interested in or getting a college degree that I wasn't going to use. But I will use my GI Bill once I retire to take some college courses. I want to know more about accounting and record keeping, so I will take some business courses to run my business.

Another sergeant first class said,

> When I did take college courses while working on my Associate's degree, almost every class I enrolled in had to do with computers and networking. I was lucky because, when I had my military experience and schooling evaluated for college credit, I ended up only having to take a few courses that I wasn't interested in. Since then, I have been enrolled in Microsoft's certification program because every one I've talked to is able to go right into good paying jobs once they get this certification.

A soldier from the focus group interviews who had not taken a college course in the past 5 years said,

> I wish colleges would do away with mandating that a person has to take X, Y, and Z to get a degree. To me, if I'm trying to get a degree in computer science, they should let me take all the courses that are available in that area because that is the skill I'm trying to get. Making me take Western Civ is totally irrelevant to me.

Another nonparticipant was more specific:

> I wish they offered welding certification programs at some of the colleges. I've learned this on my own, but I would like to have the required license.

The Job Promotion Factor

The third factor that influenced whether nonparticipants elected to enroll in formal, for-credit college courses was the *Job Promotion* variable. Eight nonparticipants named this reason as a primary factor that influenced participation. One soldier said,

> In my MOS, most of my peers have at least an Associate's degree. So, the main reason I took college courses was to get my degree to be competitive with my peers for promotion to sergeant first class.

Another interviewee said,

> I would have to say that my first motivation for taking college courses was to move up through the ranks.

Another soldier said,

> Without a doubt, I finished my Associate's and started on my Bachelor's to get promoted.

The fourth soldier who named this factor as his primary reason for past participation in postsecondary educational opportunities said,

> One of the things the Army looks at for promotion is the amount of civilian education someone has. So I took college courses so this part of my file would show that I had some college.

Discussion

In summary, the three factors named by nonparticipants as having the most impact on their motivations to participate in postsecondary educational opportunities were the *Interest in Subject*, *Learn a Specific Skill*, and *Job Promotion* factors. I explain below how the three primary reasons discussed in this section compare with theoretical categories from past research efforts and note whether any significant correlations exist between the demographic and nondemographic variables incorporated into this study's research design.

The Interest in Subject Category

In this study 13 nonparticipants expressed that their individual motivational orientations toward postsecondary educational opportunities were affected most by course offerings that were of interest. Whereas 15 nonparticipants listed deterrents/barriers to participation that were consistent with a *lack of interest* toward college in general (Figure 14), the motivational orientations of the above subgroup of nonparticipants suggest that past and future inclinations to participate are high when the subject matter is of personal interest (e.g., zoology, welding, and woodworking). When compared to the categories developed from past research efforts, the *Interest in Subject* category identified from this study's data most closely relates to the *questionable worth, relevance*, or *quality of educational opportunities* factors identified by Scanlan (1986).

The Learn a Specific Skill Category

In this study 11 nonparticipants from the individual and focus group interviews expressed that the desire to *Learn a Specific Skill* had the most impact on their past and future inclinations to participate in college offerings. This category

was developed from responses that contained expressions about specific courses that led to certifications and licensures. For example, some soldiers indicated that their decisions to participate in postsecondary educational opportunities were based solely on individual course offerings that were of specific interest, such as an introductory course in zoology. In such cases, soldiers' reasons for participation were coded in the *Interest in Subject* category.

The *Learn a Specific Skill* category was conceived based on soldiers' sentiments that contained elements associated with alternative educational programs, such as learning about automobile or computer repair. When compared to the categories developed from past research efforts regarding military populations, none of the factors in the literature directly relate to the *Learn a Specific Skill* category identified from this study's data.

The Job Promotion Category

In this study, 8 nonparticipants indicated that their primary reason for college participation was based on considerations related to job promotions and career advancement. Whereas the *Job Promotion* category was the third most cited factor for nonparticipants, only 3 of the 47 interviewees categorized as participants gave this reason as a primary factor that impacted their motivational orientations toward postsecondary educational opportunities. When compared to the factors developed from past research efforts of military populations, the *Job Promotion* category conceived from this study's data most closely relates to Brown's (1993) *to get promoted faster* factor and Brauchle's (1997) *career enhancement* category.

The three reasons presented in this section impacted nonparticipants' orientations toward college comprised over 70% of the total 45 responses. As

depicted in Figure 13, none of the three factors constituted a primary reason that influenced the motivational orientations of soldiers who were categorized as participants.

An analysis of the demographic variables revealed no significant correlations between the situational, attitudinal, institutional variables and the nondemographic factors identified in chapter 2, with the exception of gender. Of the 24 nonparticipants who listed either the *Interest in Subject* or *Learn a Specific Skill* as their primary reason for participating in postsecondary educational opportunities, 19 (almost 80%) were male soldiers. None of the other demographic variables (marital status and race) showed a significant correlation with nonparticipants' stated reasons for participation.

Participants' Motivational Orientations and Factors That Influenced Participation

In this section, I review the three primary factors that participants rated as having a positive affect on their current participation in postsecondary educational opportunities. Embedded in this discussion is a synthesis of the specific demographic variables that interacted with certain nondemographic factors.

The Obtain a Credential Factor

A total of 14 participants from the individual and focus group interviews stated that a desire to *Obtain a Credential* had a positive impact on past and current decisions to participate in postsecondary educational opportunities. One senior noncommissioned officer's response illustrates how his upcoming retirement and career transition was one reason (*Prepare for a New Career*) that influenced his current motivations to obtain a credential.

> Right now, all I'm focused on is finishing my degree. When I first came in the Army, I was always hounded with the fact that, if you take college classes, it will give you more college, it will give you more credits for the promotion for E5, so my driving factor was I wanted to get as many points as possible for the promotion board. Now, with 18 years in the Army, my drive is more focused on after the Army. I want to be able to get somewhat of a decent paying job, and the only way I see it happening is with a Bachelor's degree at a minimum.

Another interviewee who was a participant said succinctly,

> I need that piece of paper to show future employers what I already know how to do.

Likewise, a third soldier said,

> My focus has been on finishing my degree.

A master sergeant nearing retirement said,

> I could give a real unique perspective on this, considering I am in the job market now. A friend of mine just offered to hire me, and all he cared about was how many actual credit hours in college that I had, even though I was *his* supervisor when he was in the Army! He is now a $60,000- to 80,000-a-year engineer because he went directly to college when he got out. It seems like a lot of the jobs [on] bulletin boards request college degrees, not necessarily experience. I have over 19 years of experience. I could probably fix any radio, but I do not have that piece of paper yet. So my main reason for going to school is to finish my degree.

In a similar vein, a sergeant first class echoed the above soldiers' sentiments:

> To be honest, right now my main reason is to punch my ticket. That's what I call a college degree, to get me in the door to show individuals that I have the skill. The bottom line is, if you don't have a degree, you are not making yourself above the individuals that went to college and have the experience, too. People in the Army have the experience, but you need that piece of paper to be marketable.

Another participant expressed that his motivation to participate in postsecondary education was based on the desire to obtain a credential:

> When I first started out, I thought that getting my Associate's [degree] was a pretty big deal. But I've read that a Bachelor's degree today is the equivalent of what an Associate's used to be. So that's been my main motivation to finish up my Bachelor's. And I will probably continue on, because I don't think a Bachelor's will be enough.

The Enhanced Self-Efficacy Factor

The second factor that influenced soldiers in this category to enroll in formal, for-credit, college courses was the *Enhanced Self-Efficacy* that resulted from participation. Participants' responses to the interview questions about factors that impacted their motivational orientations toward postsecondary educational opportunities are captured by one master sergeant's narrative, as she cogently explained how the act of participation was greatly influenced by the resultant acquisition of a sense of self-efficacy:

> I don't know how to explain this, but going to college gave me confidence when I'm dealing with these people in the military, mostly because these young officers think that all enlisted people are stupid and we don't have nothing but a high school diploma, and that puts me on that level with them, so that gave me that confidence when I stand up and talk. I know what I'm talking about and I have the knowledge. Not just military knowledge, but book smarts, too.

Another female participant said,

> To show them, hey, just because you're an officer doesn't mean you're better than me. So that gave me a lot of confidence. Confidence, a sense of achievement. Like I said, I am so proud of myself and it makes me feel good because I think I'm the only one, as far as I know, in my mom's family who even attempted to get an education higher than a high school diploma.

The narratives below highlight how interviewees perceived certain supervisors' actions as part of an organizational culture that valued college credentials as a discriminator for individual competence. The text exemplifies how a subgroup of senior enlisted soldiers interviewed for this study felt a need to participate in order

to develop an enhanced sense of self-efficacy. The statement by one sergeant first class who was nearing completion of her Bachelor degree reflect this phenomenon:

> I have found that, simply because I am at a status and level of education that is close to a lot of commissioned officers, they tend to treat me better than a lot of my peers with no college. Because I have participated in higher learning, I think I am more effective at work. One of my biggest motivations for getting my degree has been the value that commissioned officers assign to it. It's almost as if, "Oh you're educated, so I will listen to you now."

A male participant expressed how college participation enhanced his sense of self-efficacy:

> Self-improvement was and is my main reason for participating because I wanted to be at a level with commissioned officers. Sometimes, in the military, your job is great but, once you have met the objectives, you are really not challenged anymore. It gets repetitive and monotonous. I feel better at work and in life in general when I'm going to school.

A female sergeant first class who was a single parent said,

> When I first came in, because of my MOS, I was the only female in a lot of my units. A lot of the male soldiers wouldn't listen to me just because I was a female. It has gotten better, but taking college courses has helped me with my confidence in front of groups, especially some of these male know-it-alls. So I would say the confidence and the knowledge are the main reasons I have continued with my education.

The Prepare for a New Career Factor

Eight participants named this reason as a primary factor that influenced participation. One soldier said,

> I knew that when I PCS'ed [made a permanent change of station to] here that this was going to be my last assignment before retiring. So I wanted to finish my degree before I left the Army and started my second career.

Another interviewee said,

> My main motivation for taking college courses has been to prepare for civilian life after the Army.

Another soldier said,

> I just don't feel very comfortable getting out of the Army in a couple of years with only an Associate's [degree].

The fourth soldier who named this factor as his primary reason for past participation in postsecondary educational opportunities said,

> I want to be prepared so that I don't limit myself to the types of jobs I can apply for.

Discussion

The three factors named by participants as having the most impact on their motivations to participate in postsecondary educational opportunities were the *Obtain a Credential, Enhanced Self-Efficacy*, and *Prepare for a New Career* factors. I explain below how the three primary reasons compare with theoretical categories from past research efforts and note whether any significant correlations exist between the demographic and nondemographic variables incorporated into this study's research design.

The Obtain a Credential Category

In this study 14 participants expressed that their individual motivational orientations toward postsecondary educational opportunities were affected most by a desire to obtain a credential. As opposed to the *Learn a Specific Skill* reason, the *Obtain a Credential* category was conceived based on soldiers' sentiments that contained elements associated with traditional notions about postsecondary education, such as the attainment of an Associate's or Bachelor's degree.

Whereas the *Obtain a Credential* reason was the primary factor for interviewees categorized as participants, only 4 nonparticipants indicated that obtaining a credential was a primary consideration that had a positive effect on their decisions to participate in postsecondary educational opportunities (Figure 12). When compared to the factors developed from past research efforts, the *Obtain a Credential* category conceived from this study's data most closely relates to the pragmatic reasons of *job advancement* and *promotion* identified by Murphy (1977) and Meinhardt (1979).

The Enhanced Self-Efficacy Category

A total of 12 participants' stated reasons for postsecondary educational participation were consistent with a desire to gain an enhanced sense of self-efficacy. Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as an individuals' personal assessment of his or her abilities to accomplish a specific task. The self-efficacy category is conceived as the process whereby soldiers choose to participate in postsecondary educational opportunities and persevere even when confronted with barriers and deterrents to participation. After the *Obtain a Credential* reason, the *Enhanced Self-Efficacy* factor was most cited by the 47 participants. None of the 45 nonparticipants indicated this reason as a factor that impacted their motivational orientations toward postsecondary educational opportunities. When compared to the categories developed from past research efforts of military populations, none of the factors in the literature directly relate to the *Enhanced Self-Efficacy* category identified from this study's data.

The Prepare for a New Career Category

In this study, 9 participants and 6 nonparticipants indicated that their upcoming retirement and career transition was the primary factor that affected their decision to participate in postsecondary educational opportunities. This category was conceptualized as those soldiers' sentiments about participation that were associated with Schlossberg's (1995) Life Transition Theory. For example, as opposed to the *Job Promotion* category, which focused on soldiers' participatory behavior based on their current jobs within the U.S. Army, the *Prepare for a New Career* category was based on soldiers' responses that indicated reasons for participation in preparation for employment opportunities after retirement from the service.

When compared to the factors developed from past research efforts of military populations, the *Prepare for a New Career* category conceived from this study's data most closely relates to Brown's (1993) *to get a better job after retirement* factor and Brauchle's (1997) *enhanced career opportunities after separation from the service* category. None of the three factors that were named by nonparticipants as primary reasons for participation was indicated by participant interviewees as a consideration that influenced their motivational orientations toward postsecondary educational opportunities. An analysis of the nondemographic variables incorporated into this study's research design revealed no significant correlations between the variables depicted in Figure 13, with the exception of gender. A total of 23 female soldiers categorized as participants were interviewed for this study. Of the 12 participants who provided reasons that were coded as the *Enhanced Self-Efficacy* factor, 10 (> 80%) were female soldiers.

Nonparticipants' Barriers/Deterrents to Participation

This section covers the three primary factors that nonparticipants rated as having a positive impact on past participation in college offerings. Embedded in this discussion is a synthesis of the specific demographic variables that interacted with certain nondemographic factors.

The Lack of Interest Factor

A total of 15 nonparticipants from the individual and focus group interviews stated that a *Lack of Interest* in college in general was a primary reason for not participating in college offerings (Figure 14). Ten of the 15 nonparticipant interviewees who stated this factor as an inhibitor to participation also named either the *Learn a Specific Skill* or the *Interest in Subject* reasons, depicted in Figure 12, as a primary positive influence on past decisions to participate. For example, one nonparticipant said,

> The reason I don't take college courses is because the education counselors direct what you can and cannot take based on what a specific degree requires. You have to take what they say because, otherwise, they won't sign off on your tuition assistance form. But I'm not interested in a lot of these courses because I'm not trying to get a traditional degree. I would like to take some woodwork courses, but if I did, I would have to pay for them myself. So that's the main reason.

The *Lack of Interest* reason expressed as a barrier to participation was captured by one sergeant first class:

> I would just rather be doing other things. I don't really like school, anyway. If I'm interested, then I will more than likely sign up. I will go, but I haven't seen a lot of courses that I'm interested in.

A female nonparticipant from a focus group interview said,

> I have too many other interests outside of going to school. I'm not saying college isn't important; it's just that right now it is way down on my list of priorities. One day, I will go back to school, though.

Another nonparticipant explained:

> My job here at [Fort Military] is as an instructor. So the last thing I want to do at night or on a weekend is be in a classroom environment, because that's what I do all week.

A 43-year-old sergeant first class with over 19 years of service said,

> I enjoy my time off doing things that I enjoy doing and school is not one of those things that I enjoy doing. It is painful.

Likewise, when asked why he had not taken a college course in the past 5 years, one master sergeant said,

> Because I am totally uninterested in college. If it doesn't interest me, I don't want to do it.

The *Lack of Interest* in college in general conceptual category is captured by the explanation by one sergeant first class:

> I'm not saying college ain't important. But some of the leaders I know, and I'm including myself, don't have any college. Some soldiers, all they do is go to school. They have all the book smarts, but they couldn't lead a soldier across the room. That's all I'm saying, college ain't for me.

The Lack of Course Offerings Factor

The second factor that impeded nonparticipants' abilities to participate in postsecondary educational opportunities was a *Lack of Course Offerings*. As Figure 14 illustrates, 12 of the 45 nonparticipants from the individual and focus group interviews provided sentiments similar to that of a Hispanic nonparticipant female:

> Maybe they should offer more classes at different installations with more colleges. Like now, I'm with one particular school but I can't continue here because the classes I need aren't available. You know if they could have like a set pattern . . . if you, you know, like these certain schools at these particular installations, possibly instead of start here and then pick back up there. You end up having to finish with another school.

When asked how many times in her career she had to changed schools, she replied:

> Three times, and I'm not sure if I'm gonna finish anytime soon because, like I said, when I PCS [make a Permanent Change of Station], I can finish taking the classes that I need when I get to my new post and transfer them to the college I was with, or I can take everything that I have and transfer it to another college and see [whether] I have enough to get a degree with them.

Another female nonparticipant said,

> The courses that I need to finish my degree aren't offered here.

One sergeant first class, who has two Associate's degrees but had not taken a college course in the past 5 years, said,

> I have not enrolled in any programs because the last two posts I've been to did not have the types of degrees I wanted. Earlier in my career, I finished two Associates because the degrees were in courses that I liked. One was an AA in Criminal Justice, and the other one was in electronics.

A male interviewee from a focus group interview said,

> I'm not going to waste my time taking courses that aren't going to be applied to my degree. The courses that I need to finish my degree aren't offered here. All of the courses that my college says are transferable aren't available here at [Fort Military] and they weren't available in my previous assignment in Germany, either.

The Time Constraints Factor

A total of 9 nonparticipants named this reason as a primary factor that presented a barrier to past college participation. One soldier said,

> I just don't have the time to take college course right now.

Another interviewee said,

> The biggest deterrent for me not participating lately has been not having enough time.

Another third soldier said,

> This is going to sound like an excuse, but some people have more time than others. I have four sons that have been involved in all types of things that take up all of my personal time.

The fourth soldier who named this factor as his primary reason for past participation in postsecondary educational opportunities said,

> It just seems like that every time I think about taking a college course, something else always comes up. I would have to say time has been the biggest factor.

Discussion

The three factors named by nonparticipants as having the most impact on their perceived barriers to participation in postsecondary educational opportunities were the *Lack of Interest, Lack of Course Offerings,* and *Time Constraints* factors. I explain below how the three categories compare with theoretical categories from past research efforts and note whether any significant correlations exist between the demographic and nondemographic variables incorporated into this study's research design.

The Lack of Interest Category

As opposed to the *Interest in Subject* conceptual category, whereby interviewees' indicated that specific courses of personal interest served as a motivator for participation, the *Lack of Interest* category was derived from soldiers' statements that college participation was a low priority or even unnecessary. In this

study, 15 nonparticipants listed deterrents/barriers to participation that were consistent with a lack of interest in college in general. The *Lack of Interest* category was not a primary reason given by participants as a factor that impeded their ability to participate in postsecondary educational opportunities. When compared to Scanlan's (1986) synthesis of past research findings, the *Lack of Interest* category identified from this study's data most closely relates to *negative educational perceptions* and the *apathy or lack of motivation* factors.

The Lack of Course Offerings Category

The *Lack of Course Offerings* category was the second rated reason given by nonparticipants as a deterrent/barrier to participation. In this study, more than double the number of soldiers (12) who were nonparticipants suggested that the unavailability of specific college courses deterred participation, as compared to 5 participants who listed this reason as a primary barrier. When compared to Scanlan's (1986) synthesis of past research findings, the *Lack of Course Offerings* category identified from this study's data most closely relates to the *incompatibilities of time and/or place* factor.

The Time Constraints Category

Both participants and nonparticipants listed primary deterrents to participation that were associated with the *Time Constraints* category. In this study, 9 nonparticipants and 3 participants indicated that other commitments, such as family and work obligations, resulted in time limitations that created a primary barrier/ deterrent to participation in postsecondary educational opportunities. When compared to Scanlan's (1986) synthesis of past research findings, the *Time Constraints*

category identified from this study's data most closely relates to the *individual, family, or home-related problems* category.

As Figure 15 depicts, while 5 participants mentioned that the *Lack of Course Offerings* created a barrier to participation, none of the soldiers categorized as participants listed the *Lack of Interest* factor as a primary deterrent to participating in postsecondary educational opportunities. An analysis of the other demographic variables incorporated in this study's research design revealed no significant correlations between the nondemographic factors shown in Figure 14.

Participants' Barriers/Deterrents to Participation

This section covers the three primary factors that participants rated as having a positive impact on past participation in college offerings. Embedded in this discussion is a synthesis of the specific demographic variables that interacted with certain nondemographic factors.

The Type of Unit Assignment Factor

A total of 17 participants from the individual and focus group interviews stated that the *Type of Unit Assignment* factor was the greatest deterrent/barrier to college participation. Of the 13 conceptual categories developed from the data, the *Type of Unit Assignment* reason had the highest percentage (85%) of respondents who named this factor as having a primary influence on their motivational orientations and perceived barriers to college participation when accounting for soldiers' current unit assignments. Specifically, 13 of 20 soldiers assigned to field units at Fort Military named this variable as their primary obstacle to participation. A

majority of the participant interviewees assigned to a tactical or field unit at Fort

Military shared experiences similar to that of the sergeant first class below:

> Two times so far I have had to withdraw from a class because a field problem would come up. I could not meet the requirements. The instructors wouldn't let you miss but so many hours of class time. In this unit, I do not have regular work hours. It could be from 4 o'clock in the morning to 10 o'clock at night. I was, however, able to complete seven classes with 21 upper-level credits when we once had predictable hours. So my biggest obstacle has been tactical units with an unstable atmosphere.

A second solider said,

> Without a doubt, my biggest obstacle has been when I have been assigned to field units.

Another soldier categorized as a participant said,

> The unit I'm in now is the type of unit that only focuses on the mission. Very few people in my company go to school. The ones that do end up missing a lot of their classes because we are always in the field or preparing to go the field. Everywhere else I have been, I have had the opportunity and I have taken it, with the exception of this unit. It has been my toughest assignment as far as trying to go to school.

A sergeant first class from a participant focus group interview said,

> It is impossible to go to school in the unit I'm in right now. Nothing can be planned because things change so quickly.

Another participant from a focus group interview said,

> With my MOS, I have been in both tactical and garrison units. So I knew coming here that, if I was able to take just a few courses, I would be lucky, because this unit deploys all over the world. But I haven't been able to yet.

A sergeant from the individual interviews lamented,

> My participation in college has been dependent upon the type of unit I was in. There was no other reason that I would say that has kept me from going to school. I used to think that, once I made rank, I would be able to manage going to school better. But that hasn't been the case with

> units like I'm in right now because, with the more rank you have, after the soldiers are released for the day, the more time you have to spend in meetings with the sergeant major and the battalion commander. You can't just say, "Hey, I won't be there because I'm going to school."

The Unsupportive Supervisors Factor

Another factor that impeded participants' abilities to participate in post-secondary educational opportunities was *Unsupportive Supervisors*. One interviewee assigned to a tactical or field unit said,

> This particular unit that I'm in right now has pretty bad leadership. Soldiers in other battalions who are out on the same exercises as my unit are allowed to go to school. Not only do my commander and first sergeant refuse to let anyone come back in from the field at night to go to school, they even delay signing tuition assistance forms for school even when we're not deployed.

Another participant said,

> My experience has been that there are two types of supervisors: those who support you and those who don't because they don't have any college themselves. I remember one supervisor, when he found out I was almost finished with my Bachelor's degree and was thinking about starting a Master's, he said, "What are you doing that for?"

A third soldier said,

> My boss is my biggest impediment.

A participant in a focus group interview said,

> I asked my commander if I could take a lunchtime class and he said something about my priorities not being in the right place. But this same commander offers first-term soldiers all kinds of reenlistment options that include going to school at lunch and even having a whole semester off from work to go to school full time. You see, there is nothing in it for him to let me go to school because I'm past the point of having to reenlist again. But for the lower enlisted soldiers, he can look good in the eyes of the battalion commander because he gets them to reenlist and stay in.

In a similar vein, an interviewee stated,

> For my supervisor, it's all about what's in it for him. Me going to college doesn't benefit him, so he has never really been very supportive of giving me the time to do it.

Another soldier said,

> It seems like the soldiers who have bosses that are going to school themselves are the ones who have the least problems taking college courses. That has been what I have seen throughout my Army career, anyway. I work for an idiot. He doesn't have any college and is clueless about what a sacrifice it is to go to school. He only looks at it as someone getting over or something. I never understood this because it is during my off-duty time. But to him, there is no such thing as off-duty time.

The soldiers' narratives suggest that the two factors discussed in this section are closely aligned. For example, the data from the individual and focus group interviews revealed that soldiers categorized as participants were able to overcome the *Type of Unit Assignment* variable when assigned to field units when a *Supportive Supervisor* was present. Thirteen noncommissioned officers indicated that their primary obstacle to participation was assignment to tactical or field units. However, 9 of these soldiers provided examples in which they were able to overcome this obstacle when supportive supervisors facilitated continued college participation. For example, narratives about supervisors who facilitated college participation for these interviewees included sentiments such as that of one sergeant first class:

> I have a good NCO now . . . even though I hated him at first. When I first got here, I didn't even think about going to school because of the type of unit we are. But he got me involved. He fights for the soldiers taking college course and makes sure we get a chance to come out of the field and go to our classes when we're deployed locally. I can't say that about my previous supervisor.

Another soldier assigned to a field unit that was participating in postsecondary educational opportunities said,

> Just last month, my supervisor didn't have to let me leave the field to go and take my final exams. I have had supervisors in the past who just didn't care. He could have made me miss them because they weren't letting anybody leave the site. But he let me leave. He didn't have to do that. So I really appreciated that.

A soldier from one of the focus group interviews said,

> I can tell that my boss wants me to graduate. Whenever I tell him I need to go here or do this, when it's related to college, he never gives me a hard time.

A sergeant first class who had been deployed away from Fort Military two times in the past year said,

> There are times when I have had to miss class because of deployments. But whenever our unit is participating in field exercises on post, the first sergeant always makes sure that soldiers who are taking college courses are released to go back to the rear, go to class, and then come back out to the field site.

Soldiers assigned to field or tactical units also offered examples of supervisors not only allowing them to go to school but also facilitating their college participation in other ways. Five senior enlisted soldiers provided examples of supervisors helping them with their course studies. A Black male master sergeant assigned to a field unit said,

> Some supervisors have a great outlook on their soldiers going to school; others in my chain of command that I've come into contact with have also helped. I once told my battalion commander some of the difficulties I was having in my business administration class. I found out that's what he majored in college. So there is a source for me to go and hit up and to further help me out in statistics.

A female sergeant first class shared a similar experience:

> My boss has a degree in English, so he always takes the time to proofread my papers. He doesn't have to do this, you know. So that has been a great help, especially when I start to feel overwhelmed by work, school, and things that come up with my family.

Another soldier said,

> I have the type of job where I usually work right through lunch. But when my supervisor found out I was taking college courses, he suggested that I take a break from work at lunch and work on my college homework. Before he mentioned this, I wouldn't have even thought about doing that.

The interviewee's narrative below provides an additional example in which a supportive supervisor was able to assist a participant to overcome what at first appeared to be an insurmountable obstacle to continued college participation.

> I ran out of tuition assistance one time and I didn't have the money to pay for the upcoming term. Because I was an E-8, there was no way I was going to get a scholarship. When I told my boss, he told me about a scholarship available. He helped me put in that scholarship packet and even hand carried it into the colonel's office for his endorsement. I know I wouldn't have received this grant if it wasn't for my sergeant major, because all of the education counselors said that there was no way I would get it. If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be graduating this year.

Finally, a soldier expressed how supervisors have been both sources of both support and barriers for his college participation when he said,

> I can honestly say that although I have had a lot of supervisors who didn't support me when I was trying to take college classes throughout my career, I have had a few that have made the difference in me completing my Associate's and starting my Bachelor's.

The Frequent Relocations Factor

A total of eight *participants* named this reason as a primary factor that impeded participation. One soldier said,

> I don't know about you, but I have moved twelve times in my career. Just when I start a program, it's time to move again and it's like starting over.

Another interviewee said,

> The biggest obstacle for me has been staying in one place long enough to finish a program without having to transfer all of these credits back and forth.

Another soldier said,

> It took my first 10 years in the Army just to finish my Associate's degree because of all the Army moves I had to make. So the constant PCS moves has been the biggest obstacle for me.

The fourth soldier who named this factor as his primary barrier to participation in postsecondary educational opportunities said,

> Assuming you already have your Associate's, most people in the Army need 3 or 4 years to complete a Bachelor's. But I have never been in one place long enough without having to switch schools.

Discussion

The three factors named by participants as being the greatest obstacles to participation in postsecondary educational opportunities were the *Type of Unit Assignment*, *Unsupportive Supervisor*, and *Frequent Relocations* factors. I explain below how the three categories compare with theoretical categories from past research efforts and note whether any significant correlations exist between the demographic and nondemographic variables incorporated into this study's research design.

The Type of Unit Assignment Category

Soldiers' responses that were coded and designated to the *Type of Unit Assignment* category were based on the characteristics associated with various Army units, as outlined in chapter 3. For this study, the *Type of Unit Assignment* category was a factor named by interviewees as having both positive and negative influence on college participation. Specifically, 3 interviewees categorized as nonparticipants and 4 interviewees categorized as participants expressed that assignments to field and garrison units had the greatest impact on their motivational orientations toward postsecondary educational opportunities.

However, 17 participants expressed that assignment to specific types of field units was the primary deterrent/barrier to their participation in college courses. Only 2 of the 45 soldiers categorized as nonparticipants gave primary reasons for barriers/deterrents to participation that were coded as the *Type of Unit Assignment* category. When compared to the categories developed from past research efforts, the *Type of Unit Assignment* category identified from this study's data most closely relate to Brown's (1993) *participative/nonparticipative units* category.

The Unsupportive Supervisors Category

In this study, the *Unsupportive Supervisors* category was named as a primary reason by interviewees as having both positive and negative influence on college participation. Specifically, the category *Unsupportive Supervisors* was the second- and fourth-rated reason for barriers/deterrents to participation as stated by interviewees categorized as participants and nonparticipants, respectively. Twelve out of 47 participants suggested that unsupportive supervisors were deterrents to past postsecondary educational opportunities, while 5 of 45 nonparticipants gave

this reason as their primary barrier to college participation. Five soldiers (participants) who were currently enrolled in college courses named *Supportive Supervisors* as a positive factor in response to the interview questions about motivational orientations toward college.

The *Unsupportive Supervisors* category was not a primary reason given by nonparticipants as a factor that influenced their attitudes about postsecondary education. When compared to the categories developed from past research efforts of military populations, the *Unsupportive Supervisors* category identified from this study's data most closely related to the *lack of encouragement* and the *influence of a significant other* categories noted by researchers Martindale and Drake (1989) and Meinhardt (1979), respectively. An analysis of the demographic factors incorporated into this study's research design revealed no significant correlations with the nondemographic variables depicted in Figure 15.

The Frequent Relocations Category

Nine soldiers who were participants indicated that frequent reassignments during their careers were a primary impediment to college participation. Included in this conceptual category were soldiers' sentiments about the unavailability of specific colleges and universities at various Army installations. The *Frequent Relocations* category was the third-rated reason by participants as a barrier/deterrent to participation. None of the 45 interviewees from both the individual and focus group interviews that were categorized as nonparticipants stated that this factor as a primary deterrent to participation. When compared to the categories developed from past research efforts, none of the factors in the literature directly relate to the phenomenon of soldiers' frequent relocations.

Aspects Associated With First-Generation College Students

The data from this part of the research study provide answers to the first research question: *What are the characteristics of participating adult learners that differentiate them from nonparticipants?*

In addition to the identification of variables associated with interviewees' motivational orientations toward postsecondary educational opportunities and perceived barriers/deterrents to participation, this study's research design included inquiries about the aspects associated with first-generation college students and life transitions. The first-generation college students in this study shared common characteristics. The soldiers (a) were enlisted soldiers, (b) were older, (c) attended college part time, (d) worked full time, (e) possessed a high school diploma or equivalent, (f) had already completed an Associate degree, and (g) were near retirement and a career transition.

Over 70% of the study's participants who were first-generation students responded with sentiments similar to that of this interviewee:

> I wish my father, or mother for that fact, would have pushed us kids more into going to school after high school. I really do. I just, I feel that I could have done this easily after high school. But when you don't have parents who really emphasize college, you know what I'm saying? His way of life was go get a job, go in the military. "You really don't need to get a college education." He kinda left it up to us if we wanted to, and I just wish I had more of a nudge to go in that direction.

Another soldier stated,

> When I think about it, going to college was something that my parents never really talked about when us kids were growing up.

A Black female who was a single mother and categorized as a participant said,

> They didn't look at higher education as being important. You know, even today, they say, "Why are you doing that?" I always have to explain to them this is just something that I wanted to get 'cause that's why I joined the military from the get-go, and I would have felt like a failure if I didn't get it. But, my mom never graduated from high school. My sister is a high school grad. My two brothers dropped out in the ninth grade. My dad is also just a high school graduate. So, nobody ever went higher.

At the same time, first-generation soldiers who were nonparticipants offered similar parental perspectives about college. One White male said,

> Growing up, I don't think my mother really had a big say one way or another or feeling about college being important. Today, even though my mother sometimes says she has a different outlook on it, because my sister is working on her doctorate and she sees all the work she goes through, I don't believe that she feels that anyone needs to have that much college to be successful in life.

The above statements indicate that one aspect of soldiers who are first-generation students was their parents' indifference to postsecondary educational participation. However, as the data from this study's participants reflect, this factor alone cannot be viewed as a deterrent to college participation. In fact, enlisted soldiers' responses to their parents' indifference toward college are captured by a female participant:

> You know, one of the reasons I go to school is to succeed in life, to get a decent job and earn a decent salary. My parents don't look at that and I don't understand why. So, yeah, I am the first in my family, and now I just feel like I gotta keep going because I want that Master's degree. That's my next step. I gotta get that Master's degree.

The data from the individual and focus group interviews emphasize that most of the soldiers who participated in this study had experienced circumstances similar to those expressed above. As the literature suggests, the majority of adult

learners are first-generation college students. That is to say, senior enlisted soldiers' parents held no more than a high school diploma. For a majority of the interviewees, going to college after high school graduation was something that was never a consideration. However, the data from this study suggest that certain life circumstances attributable to soldiers categorized as participants influence their attitudes about postsecondary education. The next section introduces how participants' attitudes toward college changed throughout their careers from one of indifference to necessity.

Life Transitions

Similar to the research on adult development (Erikson, 1959; Levinson, 1986; Perry, 1981), soldiers interviewed for this study shared how changing life circumstances throughout their careers altered their attitudes toward college. A common theme offered by senior enlisted soldiers about not participating in college early in their careers is exemplified by the next quotation. A majority of the soldiers who were interviewed attributed their indifference toward postsecondary educational opportunities to a lack of maturity. For example, interviewees expressed opinions similar to those expressed by one sergeant first class:

> What kept me at first from going to school was being young and immature. When you first come in, you're so happy to be away from home, all you want to do is go shopping with your little bit of money and, you know, run around with everybody. So I think that hurt me in the beginning. I did this for my first 10 years and then, finally, when I was mature, in my late 20s, that's when I finally got serious about it. I had to pull myself away from that and say, "Hey, either you've got to stay on this track or you're not going to be able to do it. You're not going to be able to accomplish it."

A second interviewee stated,

> I was immature, plain and simple.

Another interviewee shared similar sentiments:

> I guess as I grew and matured, the element of age had something to do with it for me. In my case, because when I was young, the reason I joined the military was because I was kind of not ready to go to college. As I grew older, I just happened to be in the military when I matured and decided to start going, because I knew that I could do a full-time job and go to school.

In addition to soldiers sharing common experiences as described above, senior enlisted noncommissioned officers who were categorized as participants identified the obstacles to participation that they encountered and how they overcame these barriers to participation. The text also demonstrates how soldiers develop strategies to overcome obstacles to participation at various life events and transition markers.

The above narratives highlight how individuals' motivations toward college participation change throughout the adult life cycle. For example, soldiers interviewed for this study offered how life transitions played an important role in their decisions to participate, as expressed by a master sergeant who had just recently started taking college courses again.

> My upcoming retirement has had a big impact on me taking college courses. There were times when I probably could have taken classes but didn't, and now I regret it. I have taken just a few at a time over the past 19 years. The sad part is that I would have already have my degree. I am kind of rushing things now at the end.

Another sergeant first class said,

> At this tenure in my military career, the end is coming near, and I need to become competitive when I get out in the civilian work force. You have to have at least a Bachelor's

> to make an equivalent of what I am making now when I get out.

A master sergeant who had 45 days remaining until he retired said,

> My only regret is that I didn't start sooner on finishing up my Bachelor's degree. I had the time, but I stayed too focused on Army stuff instead of taking care of myself. Even though I feel that I won't have a problem getting a job once I retire, I think I would have had a lot more job offers with my Bachelor's degree already finished and on my resumé.

A sergeant first class said in one of the focus group interviews said,

> My outlook for the past couple of years has been, "Hey, look, I have given almost 20 years to the Army, now its time to take care of myself." Even though my commander and first sergeant try to make me feel guilty about going to school, my feeling is that they aren't going to care about me once I retire, and I have to get a job.

Observations and Document Analysis

I have addressed in this chapter how the data answers two of the study's four research questions. This study's third and second research questions were *What is the gap between the stated educational policies and reality in the provision of formal learning opportunities for career soldiers in transition?* and *How does the military setting affect the types of learning opportunities available or present barriers to participation for this specific population?*

This section provides detailed information about the Army installation at which the soldiers were interviewed. The information is based on the command's policy letters, Army regulations, and information obtained during observations.

It is clear from the data about the conceptual categories of *Type of Unit Assignment* and *Supportive/Unsupportive Supervisors* that these factors had a demonstrated effect on senior enlisted soldiers' abilities to participate. In addition to the data collected via individual and focus group interviews, I observed Fort

Military's educational counseling services and inprocessing procedures. This part of the study's research design captured aspects of the installation's setting that had both positive and negative effects on soldiers' pursuit of available learning opportunities.

My observations confirmed interviewees' experiences as they are expressed below. For example, when asked whether she in-processed the education center at Fort Military and whether the services were helpful, one master sergeant said,

> Yeah. I did see a counselor, and all they ask you is, "Do you plan on taking any classes?" If you say no, then that's the end of the conversation. If you don't show any interest, they don't talk to you. They just put down that, you know, you got your little in-brief. But if you show an interest, shoot, they will pull out all kinds of classes and say, "What are you interested in?" And that's what I did. But if you don't show any interest, they are not going to push you.

When I asked whether her experiences with education centers had been similar at other Army installations, she said,

> Yes, and sometimes you don't even talk to counselors, that I can remember. You just turn your records in and that's it, unless you're actually interested and you go and sign the little log and you get to see a counselor about college. But if you don't ask, nobody's going to talk to you about it.

A sergeant first class with over 19 years of service who was a nonparticipant confirmed these experiences:

> Well, I went to the education center, gave them my education records, and I wouldn't say they were unreceptive, but just more matter of fact. "Oh, these are your records? Do you want to take any course right now? Okay, fine, have a nice day." So it was not like they were pushing hard at getting me to take more classes.

However, when asked whether this had been his experience at other education centers, he said,

> No, they are not all the same. Other ones, the first thing they try to do is sit you down and show you a book and get you to enroll in classes. But a lot were much like this one here: "Just give us your records, this is something we have to do." They stamp your papers and send you on your way.

Another participant said,

> When I started out at the Associate level, there was more interaction and more recommendations from counselors. But as I went from post to post and I had already finished my Associate's degree, the interaction with counselors was less and less. When I got here, it was a process of, here is my paperwork, they typed my information in, and asked "What is your goal?" and that was basically it. As far as taking classes and submitting for classes, they would just basically believe what direction I said I was going in. Since I have been here, I just go in there and tell them what I want to do.

A sergeant first class who was a nonparticipant described his education center in-processing at Fort Military and other Army installations as follows:

> You know, I really cannot remember a lot of in-processing in the education centers, because I know here at [Fort Military], I went there and didn't have a folder, whatever the name of the folder is that you are supposed to have, so they made one up. At [Fort Army], I never went through the education center there, either.

One master sergeant was in the process of sending out resumés in preparation for his upcoming retirement in 2 months. He described his first interaction with the education center when he first arrived at Fort Military over 3 years ago:

> I handed in my records and walked out. There is no counseling or anything involved in that. I signed the papers and that is it.

When asked whether his experiences at Army education centers had been the same throughout his career, he said,

> Well, I remember when I in-processed in Germany. We had to sit through a little orientation. That was actually incorporated into a few days of orientation with all of

> Mannheim. Other than that, though, it was pretty much drop off your records and you leave.

I then asked whether he found the orientation helpful. He said,

> Actually, yes it was very helpful. It was actually a friend of my wife that did it. Very helpful, because they told us [about] the University of Maryland contact hours, and I immediately went down and signed up for a bunch of classes that I had been wanting to take for a while that had not been available at my last unit—some other computer classes that I was interested in.

However, when I asked a sergeant first class participant whether formal individual counseling sessions would be helpful, he said,

> Not really because a lot of the times, what I have found is that I have actually known more about programs that I was thinking of taking than they do. I felt that, just from my experience, and everywhere I have been with the military education system, I basically know more about the programs than they do, just because I am more interested than they are.

In addition to individual and focus group interviews, this study's research design included my personal observations of Fort Military's in-processing and educational counseling sessions for senior enlisted soldiers. The above text provides information about the Army installation at which senior noncommissioned officers were interviewed for this study.

An important component of adult learners' participation in postsecondary educational offerings involves accurate and timely information about the types of learning opportunities available. The data from this study confirm Cross's (1981) COR Model as it relates to the five factors associated with the process that leads to participation. However, based on my personal observations at Fort Military and the data provided by the soldiers who participated in this study, I suggest that Cross's model should be revised to situate the *Information* variable at the beginning of the model (see chapter 5). For senior enlisted soldiers, timely and accurate information

at the stages at which potential participants are evaluating attitudes about self and college in general is critical for decisions that lead to college enrollment.

Interventions for Enhanced Participation

The final question posed to both participants and nonparticipants was designed to solicit recommendations that would enhance participation for this subgroup of nontraditional students. The soldiers responded with compelling narratives about specific interventions that would facilitate senior noncommissioned officers' college-going experiences.

I asked all of the soldiers who participated in the study to respond to a hypothetical question. As noted in appendices C, D, E, and F, I concluded each of the individual and focus group interviews by asking both participants and nonparticipants what recommendations they would make to the Army's senior leadership to facilitate college participation for soldiers such as themselves. The major themes that emerged from this portion of the research data were (a) provide more alternative or nontraditional learning opportunities for adults who elect not to participate in formal, postsecondary educational programs; (b) ensure that colleges and universities operating at Army installations have course transfer policies that are sensitive to this group of students who are required to relocate frequently; and (c) refine the current personnel management system so that enlisted soldiers with tactical MOSs are not relegated solely to field assignments, where postsecondary educational opportunities are often limited.

Nontraditional Learning Opportunities

Twenty-one soldiers responded by offering recommendations similar to the following:

> Basically, the computer-oriented classes, CD ROM, or over the Internet. I remember the Sergeant Major of the Army coming around talking about how great the Army is doing this. I was enthusiastic. I was able to download the page and look at all these classes I could take, but then realized my unit didn't have a fast enough connection to actually access this. I would love to see that available. A while ago, they were talking about computers for every soldier. That would be a great policy, a laptop or something like that, so they could do stuff like that, CD ROM classes.

Another interviewee said,

> I don't like sitting in a class for 2 or 3 hours two or three times a week. I would rather do my coursework from home on a computer and then just e-mail it in to the instructor.

A nonparticipant soldier said,

> I won't take college courses the traditional way. Before I came in the Army, I went to college. I think a lot of times it is nothing more than the professor teaching what he believes or having you read his textbook. A better way would be for soldiers to be issued laptops, because of all of the deployments and stuff, and they would have access to the Internet to do research and read ideas other than the instructor's.

Another soldier said,

> The way the Army is set up, I think that the best way to go would be for soldiers to be enrolled in college courses on-line. I know they've talked about this, but they don't have anything like that available here.

The above noncommissioned officer was referring to the recent Army initiative known as the Army University Access Online (eArmyU.com), described in chapter 1. At the time of this study, Fort Military was not a participant in this program. As elaborated in chapter 5, the majority of the recent Army educational initiatives are directed at the recruitment and the retention of junior enlisted soldiers. Consequently, many of these programs did not apply to participants in this study; thus, they have important implications for senior enlisted soldiers'

abilities to participate in postsecondary educational opportunities when nearing a career transition. For example one soldier said,

> What I've seen most recently is where soldiers can now go online and get a degree . But that's not available here. This seems like an excellent program but there's a catch to everything. I just recently found out that, with this program, once you complete the degree, you have to obligate to the military an additional 3 years. So a person just coming into the military now would be a fool not to leave without at least a Master's degree by getting them online. But, by the same token, I don't think this program was meant for the senior NCOs, just the lower enlisted soldiers coming in.

Another soldier expressed similar sentiments when he said,

> That online program they just started for lower enlisted soldiers to get their degrees would definitely be something I would be interested in.

Amend Colleges and University Course Transfer Policies

The next recommendation came from soldiers lamenting about the unavailability of specific colleges and the confusing course transfer policies of postsecondary institutions operating at various military installations. Sentiments about this barrier/deterrent to participation were similar to those expressed by an Hispanic female who was nearing completion of her Bachelor's degree:

> For me, coming where I came from with a family where college was not important, it has been an ongoing struggle. It has taken me almost 9 years to get where I am. I would recommend that more colleges and classes be available for soldiers. Like now, I'm with one particular school here, but once I leave, I can't continue on with that school because it won't be available there. You know if they could have like a set pattern like at these schools or at these installations, possibly instead of start here and picking here and picking up there. You have to finish with another school and either you could transfer and get your degree with another school or you can take whatever classes. My experiences is either you can take whatever classes you

> need with the school with your gaining installation and with graduation requirement of graduation.

When asked how many times she had switched schools in her career, the soldier went on to say,

> Four times, and I'm still not sure if this will be my last. I'm not sure because when I PCS, either I can finish taking the classes that I need when I get to my new post and transfer them to the college I'm enrolled in now, or I can take everything that I have and transfer it to another college and see whether I have enough to get a degree with them.

Another soldier categorized as a participant shared his experiences about transferring from different colleges and universities.

> I have been kinda lucky because I have tried to limit as much as I can to colleges that I go to because the more colleges, from my experience, that you try to transfer in and out of, the more transcripts for colleges you are going to have to transfer.

When this sergeant was asked how many college credit hours he had lost because of differing transfer or credit requirements, he said,

> Well, a lot. Right now, I am at five, no, my sixth school, because I have transferred into this Bachelor's program here. The biggest thing is when colleges either close up, change their name, or move.

Refine the Army's Enlisted Personnel Management System

The final theme that emerged from this portion of the individual and focus group interviews involved soldiers' recommendations that focused on the management of enlisted personnel throughout their careers. Specifically, interviewees suggested that the management of enlisted persons' careers include an equal distribution of field and garrison assignments so that educational opportunities would not be limited to those soldiers in MOSs traditionally assigned to nondeployable units. As reflected by the data presented in this chapter, soldiers' reasons

associated with the *Type of Unit Assignment* category were primary barriers to participation. Both participants and nonparticipants mentioned that affording soldiers more opportunities to participate in college offerings based on assignments to garrison units would promote postsecondary educational participation. For example, many interviewees echoed the suggestion of a male soldier who had been in both field and garrison units during his 18-year career:

> The one thing I would suggest is that all soldiers assigned to tactical units be rotated every few years to fixed-station units. This way, soldiers would not have any field duty. I know lots of soldiers that got their 2-year degree and were working on their 4-year degree in 2 years. They went to school full time, afternoon and evenings, and everything else. I think every soldier should be given that opportunity to knock out easily a 2-year-degree and get half way or over half of the way or three quarters of the way toward their Bachelor's or 4-year degree.

Another interviewee said,

> I wish that the Army would take more into consideration how they assign people so that people like myself aren't always in tactical units.

Another soldier said,

> I think the Army can do more as far as rotating assignments so that everyone within a certain MOS has an opportunity to be stationed in a nondeployable unit at least a few times in their careers.

The fourth soldier who suggested this recommendation said,

> I've been pretty lucky throughout my career, but I would recommend that the personnel system be revamped so that soldiers' assignments are monitored better. This would ensure that soldiers don't spend their whole careers in the field and being deployed.

Discussion

I have presented in this section what interventions participants of this study would recommend to the Army's leadership that would enhance this subgroup of nontraditional students' abilities to participate in postsecondary educational opportunities. The major themes that emerged from the soldiers' responses to this part of the interview protocol were to (a) provide more alternative or nontraditional learning opportunities for adults who elect not to participate in formal, postsecondary educational programs; (b) ensure that colleges and universities operating at Army installations have course transfer policies that are sensitive to this group of students who are required to relocate frequently; and (c) refine the current personnel management system so that enlisted soldiers with tactical MOSs are not relegated solely to field assignments, where postsecondary educational opportunities are often limited.

Conclusions

In this chapter I sketched the salient issues involved in whether senior noncommissioned officers participate in postsecondary educational opportunities. This study's key findings are from three areas: (a) participants/ nonparticipants' motivational orientations toward postsecondary educational opportunities, (b) senior enlisted soldiers' perceived barriers/deterrents to college participation, and (c) observations and document analysis.

First, data from the soldiers' responses to the interview questions about motivational orientations and barriers to participation revealed the following three key findings:

- When compared to past research findings about enlisted soldiers' reasons for participation, four of the eight motivation categories

identified by this study (*Job Promotion, Type of Unit Assignment, Supportive/Unsupportive Supervisors,* and *Prepare for a New Career*) are compatible to factors identified by researchers Murphy (1977), Brown (1993), Meinhardt (1979), and Brauchle (1979), respectively.

- Of the remaining four motivation factors that were identified, three (*Learn a Specific Skill, Interest in Subject,* and *Obtain a Credential*) fall within Houle's (1961) three-factor typology about adult learners' motivational orientation, while the *Enhanced Self-Efficacy* factor was unique to participants of this study.
- When compared to Scanlan's (1986) eight deterrent factors, three of the seven deterrent categories identified in this study (*Type of Unit Assignment, Supportive/Unsupportive Supervisors,* and *Frequent Relocations*) were unique to senior Army enlisted soldiers at Fort Military.

Second, an analysis of the data from the 92 senior enlisted soldiers at Fort Military interviewed for this study confirms Scanlan's (1986) assertion that certain demographic variables (e.g., gender, race, and marital status) act in conjunction with certain nondemographic variables (e.g., situational, dispositional, and attitudinal variables) to influence participatory behavior. The data from this part of the interview protocol revealed the following three key findings:

- When compared to past research efforts regarding military populations, the *Enhanced Self-Efficacy* category for participants' motivational orientations and the *Frequent Relocations* category for nonparticipants' perceived barriers/deterrents to participation were factors unique to soldiers interviewed for this study.

- The *gender* demographic variable interacts with the *dispositional* non-demographic variable of participation for female soldiers' motivations and their enhanced self-efficacy.
- The nondemographic variable *Type of Unit Assignment* can be overcome as a barrier/deterrent to participation when soldiers categorized as participants have a *Supportive Supervisor*.

Third, the three major themes that emerged from the observations and document analysis portions of the research study were:

- Although the education center at Fort Military had written directives in place for in-processing procedures, soldiers' experiences and the researcher's personal observations revealed that the educational counseling services were disjointed and, at times, nonexistent.
- The educational directives, policies, and practices regarding post-secondary educational opportunities were different across commands and individual units at Fort Military, dependent on the organization's culture and its leaders' values.
- A cornucopia of learning opportunities was available to senior noncommissioned officers at Fort Military. However, only those soldiers who were familiar with how to navigate the educational process were aware of all the offerings and services that were present.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 1 presented an overview of the circumstances and characteristics associated with a subgroup of nontraditional students: senior noncommissioned officers nearing a life transition. A review of the literature on adult learners' motivational orientations and perceived barriers to postsecondary educational opportunities, presented in chapter 2, led to the conclusion that understanding why senior enlisted Army soldiers decide to participate/not participate remains incomplete. Chapter 3 explained why a qualitative research design and case study method was selected to answer the study's four research questions. Chapter 4 presented the data from both the individual and focus group interviews in order to compare the findings with the observations and document analysis portions of the study. I introduced the primary conceptual categories that emerged from the data about participants/nonparticipants' motivational orientations and perceived barriers to college participation. This was followed by the identification of the study's key findings. I presented the interviewees' responses to questions related to policy recommendations and other measures that both participants and nonparticipants viewed as positive factors that would facilitate participation.

Discussion

In this section I first elaborate on the answers to the study's four research questions. This section is followed by a summary of the study's key findings in comparison to past research efforts. Finally, based on the data from this study, I provide six recommendations for Army leaders, educational counselors, and

researchers interested in adult learners' special needs that will enhance post-secondary educational participation.

Participants'/Nonparticipants' Characteristics

The first research question was: *What are the characteristics of participating adult learners that differentiate them from nonparticipants?*

The picture that emerges from the data collected for this study is that participants' motivations for college participation are directed by an economic or investment premise, as outlined by Dhanidina and Griffith (1975). Soldiers in this study who were active participants were motivated by a sense of investing in one's human capital (Scanlan, 1986). For this group of soldiers, the perceived benefits of obtaining a credential (e.g., job promotion, acquisition of new knowledge, preparation for a new career) outweighed the costs (e.g., tuition, time, and transportation).

All soldiers who were interviewed for this study were nearing a career transition. Researchers Knox and Videbeck (1963) and Schlossberg et al. (1995) have demonstrated that this force (changes in life circumstances) positively affects participatory responses. The data collected from soldiers categorized as participants confirms the close relationship between life changes and participatory behavior (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980). However, as Merriam and Caffarella (1999) noted, the act of participation/nonparticipation involves a complex set of action/inaction by an individual based on different factors and variables. Similar to expectancy valence theory (Rubenson, 1977), nonparticipants in this study expressed sentiments that reflected their beliefs that participation in formal, for-credit college offerings was neither a significant individual goal nor an act that necessarily leads to a substantial reward (Scanlan, 1986). Nonparticipants were

more inclined to participate in a learning opportunity when the subject was of personal interest or to learn a specific skill that did not require a traditional college degree. As opposed to participants, nonparticipants revealed that situational variables such as a change in career or life circumstances had little effect on their decisions to participate/not participate in postsecondary educational opportunities.

Therefore, the data that answered the study's first research question partially supports Cross's (1981) claims that "the more education people have, the more interested they will be in further education, the more they will know about available opportunities, and the more they will participate" (p. 55). As researchers Carp, Peterson, and Roelfs (1974) and Johnstone and Rivera (1965) have suggested, education attainment levels are the most influential variable for predicting adults' future participation in formal learning activities. However, both groups in this study had attained Associate degrees. The soldiers categorized as participants continued to be engaged in formal educational opportunities, while the soldiers categorized as nonparticipants had not taken a college course in the past 5 years. An analysis of the demographic variables (gender, marital status, and race) with the nondemographic factors (career transitions and attitudes about college participation) incorporated into this study's research design revealed no significant correlations, with the exceptions of gender and the type of unit assignment. First, almost 80% of the nonparticipants who listed either *Interest in Subject* or *Learn a Specific Skill* as their primary reason for participating in postsecondary educational opportunities were male soldiers. Second, over 80% of participants who listed the *Enhanced Self-Efficacy* factor as their primary reason for participating in college offerings were female soldiers. Third, the *Type of Unit Assignment* variable had the highest percentage (85%) of respondents who named this factor as having a

primary influence on their motivational orientations and perceived barriers to college participation when factoring the soldiers' current unit assignment. Specifically, 13 of 20 soldiers assigned to field units at Fort Military named this variable as their major obstacle to participation.

For some soldiers, learning is addictive and supports the research mentioned above. For others, the act of nonparticipation is a multidimensional process (Cross, 1981). As shown in this section, this process is affected by both individual and environmental factors. Next, I expand on how the military setting at Fort Military impacted senior enlisted soldiers' abilities to participate in college offerings.

Fort Military's Effect on Soldier Participation/Nonparticipation

The second research question was: *How does the military setting affect the types of learning opportunities available or present barriers to participation for this specific population?*

The picture that emerges from the data collected for this study is that the Fort Military's educational directives, policies, and practices toward postsecondary educational opportunities were different across commands and individual units, due to different organizational cultures and individual leaders' values. Participants named the *Type of Unit Assignment* as the primary factor that impeded their abilities to participate. However, consistent with Murphy's (1977) and Meinhardt's (1979) findings that suggest that the influence of a significant other greatly impacts individuals' perceptions about deterrents to participation, the data from participants revealed that they were able to overcome the *Type of Unit Assignment* barrier to participation when company commanders, first sergeants, and other immediate supervisors facilitated their college-going opportunities. As the data illustrate,

some supervisors at Fort Military encouraged and facilitated soldiers' participation in college offerings. These *supportive supervisors* had a positive effect on the military setting and the types of learning opportunities available for soldiers categorized as participants. Other soldiers provided examples whereby *unsupportive supervisors'* actions had a negative effect on their ability to participate in post-secondary educational opportunities.

The types of learning opportunities available to soldiers at Fort Military encompassed a wide range of both formal and informal educational programs and services. I will suggest specific initiatives that Army leaders can implement that will enhance learning opportunities for senior enlisted soldiers nearing a career transition.

The Provision of Learning Opportunities for Senior Enlisted Soldiers

The third research question was: *What is the gap between the stated educational policies and reality in the provision of formal learning opportunities for career soldiers in transition?*

The picture that emerges from the data collected for this study is that Fort Military offered a wide variety of educational opportunities for soldiers. However, as other researchers have noted and as the data from this study suggests not all adult learners are motivated to participate in formal, for-credit college and university courses. The data from the individual and focus group interviews indicate that dissemination of information about other types of learning activities at Fort Military was lacking. Observations and soldiers' sentiments about the education center's in-processing briefings revealed that the counseling services were disjointed and, at times, nonexistent.

In addition to soldiers naming the lack of institutional support from their chain of command as a major deterrent to participation, the data from nonparticipants illustrate that these soldiers' frustrations centered on their inability to enroll in classes that were of a personal interest or to learn a specific skill. Future studies that investigate whether this phenomenon is prevalent at other Army installations would be useful to program administrators of educational initiatives designed to serve the learning needs of soldiers similar to those interviewed for this study.

Soldiers in Transition: A Profile of Participants

The fourth research question is directly related to the third question. In chapter 4 I compared the stated educational policies with the actual learning opportunities available for soldiers in transition at Fort Military. The basis for this discussion was the study's fourth research question: ***Who takes advantage of these opportunities, why, and how are these opportunities limited?***

The picture that emerges from the data collected for this study is that participants' primary motivation for participation was directed by their need to obtain a credential. All soldiers who were interviewed for this study were nearing a career transition. The life transitions variable weighed heavily in participants' decisions to participate. The data collected from the nonparticipants of the individual and focus group interviews suggest that an upcoming career change and life transition was not a factor that induced participation. For a clear majority of female soldiers categorized as participants, a primary motivation was based on the acquired sense of self-efficacy that resulted from their participation in postsecondary educational opportunities. For nonparticipants, the two primary motivations for college participation were enrolling in college classes when a particular subject was of personal

interest or when there was an individual desire to learn a specific skill. This finding is consistent with Boshier's (1973, 1977, 1979) suggestion that reasons for participation must be congruent with the dominant needs of the individual.

Another theme that emerged from the data suggests that nonparticipants were more inclined to participate in traditional college offerings when such courses were available in nontraditional ways. Numerous nonparticipants articulated that their learning preferences were better served by distant education or computer-assisted instruction.

In addition to the identification of the impact of life transitions on participants/nonparticipants' motivational orientations and perceived barriers/deterrents to participation, this study's research design included inquiries about the aspects associated with first-generation college students. This variable did not show a significant correlation between soldiers categorized as participants/nonparticipants and the act of college participation/nonparticipation. Both participants and nonparticipants held common experiences in relation to their parents' perspectives about postsecondary education. The data revealed that this factor alone was not a determinant for college participation. While participants and nonparticipants shared how their parents' perspectives toward college were ones of indifference, they assigned their earlier nonparticipation to a lack of maturity. For nonparticipants, their reasons for subsequent decisions not to participate are explained by the answers to the three research questions.

A Comparison of the Study's Findings to Past Research Efforts

This study's findings are compared with past research efforts in the area of nontraditional students' motivational orientations and perceived barriers to

postsecondary educational opportunities. An analysis of the data suggests that the two primary variables that had the greatest impact on participants' motivational orientations toward postsecondary educational opportunities were the *Obtain a Credential* and the *Enhanced Self-Efficacy* factors. The two primary variables that had the greatest impact on nonparticipants' motivational orientations toward post-secondary educational opportunities were the *Interest in Subject* and the *Learn a Specific Skill* factors.

The Literature on Adult Learners' Motivational Orientations

A review of the data from this study in comparison with past research findings about adults' motivational orientation toward postsecondary educational opportunities revealed that enlisted soldiers' primary reasons for participation included pragmatic reasons such as job advancement and promotion (Meinhardt, 1979; Murphy, 1977). Brauchle (1997) also found career enhancement to be a primary factor for participation. The second factor for participation listed by Brauchle for this population was enhanced career opportunities after separation from the service. Brown's (1993) study of Army enlisted personnel found that the first reason given for participation was "to get a better job after retirement." This factor was listed ahead of other pragmatic reasons such as "to get promoted faster" and "to be able to earn more money" (p. 145).

The number of soldiers' responses assigned to the conceptual categories about motivational orientations toward college participation revealed that (a) when compared to past research findings about enlisted soldiers' reasons for participation, four of the eight motivation categories identified by this study (*Job Promotion, Type of Unit Assignment, Supportive/Unsupportive Supervisors,* and *Prepare*

for a New Career) are compatible to factors identified by researchers Murphy (1977), Brown (1993), Meinhardt (1979), and Brauchle (1979), respectively; (b) of the remaining four motivation factors identified in this study, three (*Learn a Specific Skill, Interest in Subject,* and *Obtain a Credential*) fall within Houle's (1961) three-factor typology about adult learners' motivational orientation; and (c) the *Enhanced Self-Efficacy* factor was unique to participants in this study.

The Literature on Adult Learners' Perceived Barriers to Participation

A review of the data suggests that the two primary variables that had the greatest impact on participants' perceived barriers and deterrents to postsecondary educational participation were the *Type of Unit Assignment* and *Unsupportive Supervisors* factors. The two primary variables that had the greatest impact on nonparticipants' perceived barriers and deterrents to postsecondary educational participation were the *Lack of Interest* and *Lack of Course Offerings* factors.

Scanlan's (1986) synthesis of past research findings revealed that the following factors have the most impact on adult learners' decisions to participate: (a) individual, family, or home-related problems; (b) cost concerns; (c) questionable worth, relevance, or quality of educational opportunities; (d) negative educational perceptions and prior unfavorable experiences; (e) apathy or lack of motivation; (f) lack of self-confidence; (g) a general tendency toward nonaffiliation; and (h) incompatibilities of time and/or place. When compared to Scanlan's synthesis of past research,

- The *Interest in Subject* category identified from this study's data most closely relates to the questionable worth, relevance, or quality of educational opportunities factor.

- The *Lack of Interest* category most closely relates to negative educational perceptions and the apathy or lack of motivation factors.
- The *Lack of Course Offerings* category from this study most closely relates to the incompatibilities of time and/or place factor.
- The *Time Constraints* category most closely relates to the individual, family, or home-related problems category.
- The *Financial Constraints* category identified from this study's data directly most closely relates to the cost concerns category.

Other factors identified by past research findings about participation that are applicable to the subgroup of nontraditional students in this study include (a) *Lack of Encouragement* (Martindale & Drake, 1989), (b) the influence of a *Significant Other* (Meinhardt, 1979), and (c) units categorized as *Participative/Nonparticipative* (Brown, 1993). Three of the seven deterrent categories identified in this study (*Type of Unit Assignment, Supportive/Unsupportive Supervisors,* and *Frequent Relocations*) were unique to senior Army enlisted soldiers at Fort Military. Of the 13 conceptual categories reported in chapter 4, two (*Type of Unit Assignment* and *Supportive/Unsupportive Supervisors*) were factors identified by interviewees that had both positive and negative influence on college participation.

Recommendations

The aim of this study was to identify and compare the characteristics attributable to senior enlisted soldiers who participated in postsecondary educational offerings to those who did not participate, and to find out what factors impede participation for both participants and nonparticipants. This study's findings allow for (a) enhanced educational opportunities for the subgroup of nontraditional

students who participated in this study, (b) increased organizational effectiveness, and (c) theory development.

First, the data identified the environmental factors, individual characteristics, and organizational interventions that have a positive affect on senior enlisted soldiers' abilities to participate in postsecondary educational opportunities. Second, because the Army's recent "Transformation" involves an infusion of scientific advances to future combat systems, soldiers within individual units are expected to employ these advanced technologies throughout the transformation process (USDA, 2002c). The data in this study demonstrate how the availability of postsecondary educational offerings, along with an environment that promotes college participation for senior enlisted soldiers, leads to the acquisition of human capital and enhanced organizational effectiveness. Third, the findings of this study add to the development of current adult learner theories and models associated with the subgroup of nontraditional students interviewed for this research project.

Based on the study's key findings, the following four recommendations are presented.

Recommendation 1. Emphasize the various learning opportunities available for adult learners who elect not to participate in postsecondary educational programs. In recent years, the Army has developed special programs as incentives for recruitment and retention. Two examples are the GI to Jobs or Partnership for Youth Success (PaYS) and the Army University Access Online (eArmyU.com). PaYS is a program that allows a potential recruit to enlist with a guaranteed civilian job after completion of a 3- to 6-year Army service obligation. There are currently 19 civilian companies with Army PaYS agreements, including BellSouth, Johns Hopkins, Sears, DynCorp, and Pepsi. The Army University Access Online

program offers to eligible soldiers fully funded online courses leading to college degrees. In addition to a laptop computer, students receive technical support and onsite mentoring. The program's mission is to maximize the use of technology-based distance learning.

However, these initiatives have not reached senior enlisted soldiers preparing to retire from the service and start a new career. At the time of this study, the Army University Access Online was available at only five Army installations. In addition to the unavailability of the program at Fort Military, the eligibility requirement of 3 years of service remaining precludes the majority of senior noncommissioned officers interviewed for this study from participating.

One Army initiative that will assist soldiers that were categorized in this study as nonparticipants is a new Web-based service: Credentialing Opportunities On-Line (COOL). The Web site provides four major services: (a) It provides background information about civilian licensure and certification, (2) it identifies licenses and certificates relevant to Army MOSs, (c) it provides information about how Army training and experience translates into civilian credentialing requirements, and (d) it provides information about various types of resources available to assist with the civilian credentialing process (USDA, 2002d).

As the data suggest, not all senior enlisted personnel are inclined to participate in what Cross (1981) termed "adult learning for academic credit." A key finding from the data of nonparticipants is that their motivational orientations were influenced by a desire to participate in other types of "organized learning activities" (Cross, 1981) that lead to nontraditional credentials, certificates, and licenses in preparation for a postmilitary job. In fact, nearly 70% of the Army's 390,000 active-duty enlisted soldiers are in MOSs with civilian job equivalents that require

licenses or other certification (USDA, 2002c). Because the COOL project is a recent Army initiative (mid-April, 2002), more research is needed to determine the program's effectiveness in reaching soldiers Army-wide in the translation of Army job specialties to civilian professional requirements and industry standards.

In summary, the career, transition, and education counselors at Fort Military can improve upon the educational services already in place by initiating the following actions:

1. Advise and assist soldiers in using nontraditional methods when specific or formal course offerings are not available.

2. Establish procedures to monitor soldiers' progress toward nontraditional educational, vocational, and career goals.

3. Establish a coherent college credit or course transfer/acceptance policy with the colleges and universities operating at the local military installation for accredited nontraditional tests and programs such as DANTES and CLEP.

4. Assist soldiers in finding alternate funding sources such as grants and scholarships when tuition assistance is unavailable.

Recommendation 2. Ensure that colleges and universities operating at Army installations have course transfer policies that are sensitive to the unique circumstances of this highly mobile group of students. While the colleges and universities at Fort Military were members of the SOC, the data collected for this study suggest that soldiers experience difficulties in completing their Associate and Bachelor degrees as they move from station to station throughout their careers. The data suggest that soldiers' frustrations can be attributed to (a) the ambiguous transfer policies of college credits between institutions, (b) the unavailability of the soldiers' "home" college or university at other military locations, and (c) the lack

of counseling services that assist soldiers to identify college offerings that meet the course requirements of their degree plans. Soldiers who were participants explained how they were able to overcome these obstacles to participation; others expressed their frustrations in the unavailability of required courses and/or taking college classes that were not transferable.

In addition to the previous recommendations, the career, transition, and education counselors at Fort Military can enhance the services currently provided by initiating the following actions:

1. Allocate training resources to ensure that the college representatives and education counselors have the requisite understanding to provide soldiers with accurate and sound academic counseling and advice.

2. Strengthen the collaborative efforts of colleges/universities and the local military installation in improving the acceptance rate of credit for military training experience and credit by examination.

3. Establish coordination meetings between military counselors and college faculty, administrators, and representatives on a quarterly basis in order to ensure a coherent approach to the maintenance of a more flexible approach to admissions procedures and credit transfer policies.

Recommendation 3. Refine the current personnel management system so that enlisted soldiers with tactical MOSs are not relegated solely to field assignments, where postsecondary educational opportunities are often limited.

As the data show, Army soldiers face numerous obstacles throughout their careers that make it difficult to participate in postsecondary educational opportunities. For those who do participate, such as the soldiers interviewed for this study, certain barriers also make it difficult to complete a college or university degree

program: frequent moves from installation to installation, unpredictable work schedules, field training exercises and deployments, unsupportive supervisors, rigid school residency requirements, the variation among postsecondary institutions in accepting transfer credits, and the refusal of some colleges and universities to grant credit for military training and experience. An additional barrier to participation for senior enlisted soldiers is the type of unit assignment. This factor was named by interviewees categorized as participants as being the biggest obstacle to overcome in pursuing postsecondary educational opportunities.

A key recommendation made by both participants and nonparticipants is that the Army's personnel management system be more attuned to the types of installations to which soldiers are assigned throughout their careers. Soldiers suggested that a more equal distribution of field and garrison assignments would enhance their abilities to participate in college opportunities. It is not suggested here that the Army's primary mission take a back seat to senior enlisted soldiers' pursuit of a college degree. Not all Army MOSs (e.g., Infantryman) would allow for soldiers to be stationed at a nontactical or garrison installation. However, the clear majority of Army jobs allow for assignment to both field and garrison units. The data from this study suggest that some senior enlisted soldiers have been relegated solely to tactical or field assignments where postsecondary educational participation was limited. A personnel management system that considers the *Type of Unit Assignment* factor in soldier assignment decisions could provide more equitable educational opportunities for the types of soldiers who participated in this study.

Army surveys reveal that soldiers who leave the service list their inability to get the training and/or education that they desired as a primary reason to depart

(Kimmel, Nogami, Elig, & Gade, 1986). The Army's leadership can enhance the opportunities for senior enlisted soldiers to participate in postsecondary education by restructuring the current management system so that all soldiers are afforded more opportunities to attend college at different points in their career. This recommendation will (a) support the Army's current recruitment, retention, and sustainment goals; (b) enhance soldiers' military effectiveness and help them to realize their educational, vocational, and other career goals; and (c) better prepare soldiers for their transition from the Army after 20 or more years of service.

Recommendation 4. Incorporate a revised version of Cross's (1981) COR Model in the development and implementation of the Army's educational counseling services and programs. An important component of adult learners' participation in postsecondary educational offerings involves accurate and timely information about types of learning opportunities available. Educational service providers can assist adult learners such as those interviewed for this study by incorporating a modification of Cross's model. The data confirm that the five factors depicted in Figure 7 greatly influenced soldiers' decision-making processes about college participation.

However, based on the experiences expressed by those interviewed for this study, it is suggested that Cross's model be revised to situate the *Information* variable at the beginning of the model, as depicted in Figure 16. For senior enlisted soldiers at Fort Military, timely and accurate information at the stages at which potential participants are evaluating attitudes about self and about college in general is critical for decisions that lead to college enrollment.

The above recommendations are based on the data collected at one research site. While the education center at Fort Military can be categorized as typical of

other Army education centers, based on the types of counseling services and degree offerings available to soldiers, this is not to say that the observed in-processing procedures and counseling sessions outlined in chapter 4 are the same across Army installations. With more than 250 education centers worldwide and soldiers assigned to one of over 225 job specialties (USDA, 2002b), the United States Army is comprised of many organizational subcultures that have various missions, MOSs, and demographic compositions. Therefore, more research at other Army installations that incorporates a similar research design and interview protocol would help to verify the reliability and validity of this study's findings.

Recommendation 5. Administer personality-type inventories to determine whether there is a nexus between certain individual characteristics and the act of postsecondary participation/nonparticipation. The findings from this study suggest that future research efforts in this area continue to use theories in combination as a research strategy and design. This study's research questions were designed to identify what factors affected soldiers' motivational orientations and perceived barriers toward college participation/nonparticipation.

One variable that was not incorporated into this study's research design but that would be beneficial for future research efforts is the identification of the soldiers' personality types. The Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a test designed to measure how people use perception and judgment in their decision-making processes (Meyers, 1980). Future research efforts should incorporate inventories such as the MBTI to determine whether there is a nexus between certain personality types and the act of postsecondary participation/nonparticipation.

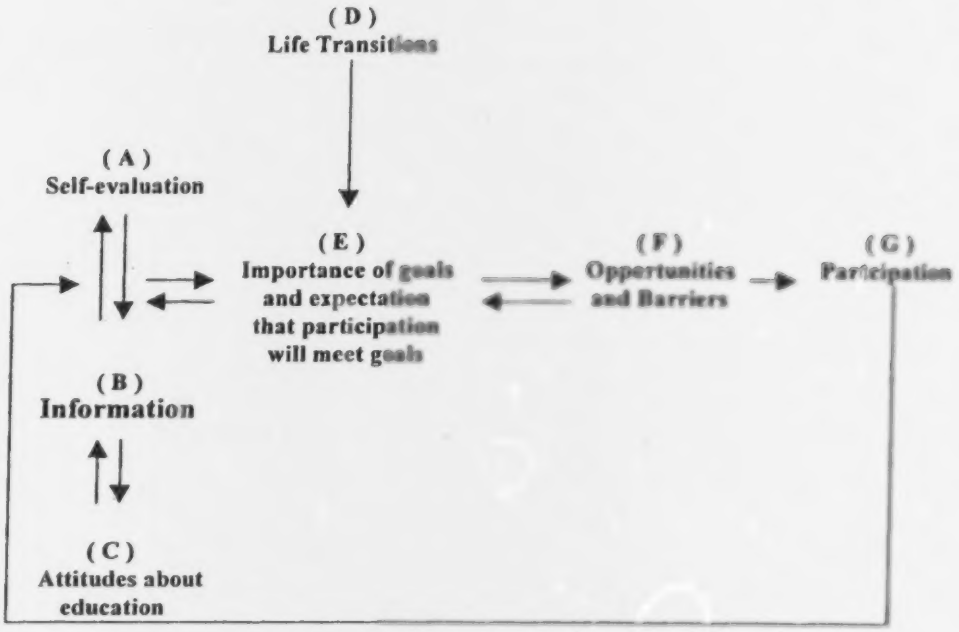

Figure 16. Cross's Chain-of-Response Model revised.

The U.S. Army currently administers the MBTI to both enlisted and commissioned officers at different points in soldiers' careers to include advanced professional development schools and MOS-specific courses. These efforts have been fragmented and have not led to any type of accessible database from which researchers can draw valuable information. Administering the MBTI when soldiers first enter the service would allow for the creation of a central database from which researchers could draw pertinent information and incorporate these data into future research efforts with little cost to the researcher or the Army.

Recommendation 6. Conduct cross-sectional and longitude studies of enlisted soldiers situated in similar environmental conditions to determine what factors have the greatest impact on motivational orientations and perceived barriers to college participation/nonparticipation across the life cycle. This study focused on the attitudes of senior enlisted soldiers toward postsecondary educational opportunities as they neared a career transition. The findings revealed that their attitudes toward college had changed throughout their careers. Future studies that compare the reasons for participation/nonparticipation by enlisted soldiers at the start of their military careers with the factors identified in this study would provide researchers with a number of possible research designs and strategies that are more holistic.

Cross-sectional longitudinal research is a type of investigation in which changes in a population over time are measured at a specific point in time from samples that vary in age and life experiences (Gall et al., 1996). Because enlisted soldiers share certain characteristics and socialization processes as well as similar environments, this cross-sectional analysis would provide researchers with a baseline for identifying the ways in which the various motivational and deterrent factors

interact with the life cycle. In turn, a complete understanding of the process of college participation/nonparticipation and the factors that contribute to soldiers' attitudes about postsecondary education over time is difficult without longitudinal studies (e.g., studies that follow the same group of soldiers from the first year of military service through the end of their contractual obligations).

Research Methods

As part of this study's research design, I devised interview questions based on the assumption that that life transitions and aspects associated with first-generation college students have an impact on soldiers' attitudes about postsecondary educational participation/nonparticipation. The rational for the incorporation of these types of probes was based on my second assumption, that the two factors play a considerable role in whether this subgroup of nontraditional students decides to participate. Third, I directed the focus of this study toward interviewing senior enlisted Army soldiers about formal, for-credit, postsecondary learning opportunities because I assumed that this type of instruction was valued most. The data collected for this study disconfirmed all three assumptions.

First, there was no correlation between students who were first-generation college students and the acts of participation/nonparticipation. Second, while changes to life circumstances such as an upcoming career transition were a primary consideration for soldiers who were categorized as participants, this variable did not factor into nonparticipants' decisions about college enrollment. Third, the data from nonparticipants revealed that this group of adult learners was more inclined to participate in other types of nontraditional learning opportunities. As opposed to the acquisition of a traditional college degree, this group of soldiers placed more

value on the participation in programs that would lead to specific licensures and certifications.

As a senior enlisted soldier, I shared many of the characteristics and experiences of the individuals interviewed for this study. I entered this research project with an intuition that participants' motivational orientations and perceived barriers/deterrents to postsecondary educational participation were directed by job promotion and time constraints factors, respectively. My second intuition was that nonparticipants would also list career enhancement considerations as a primary motivation for college participation. Third, I believed that the data from nonparticipants would reveal that barriers to participation would center on time constraints due to other types of obligations.

First, job promotion considerations were a secondary factor for *participants*. This group was more motivated to obtain a credential in preparation for a new career. Second, I anticipated neither the *Enhanced Self-Efficacy* nor *Type of Unit Assignment* considerations as primary motivations and deterrent factors for *participants*. In addition to nonparticipants' desire to participate in nontraditional programs, the third finding that was not anticipated related to this group's inclinations to participate in postsecondary educational opportunities, primarily when a specific course was of personal interest.

In order to ensure that the research findings presented in Chapter 4 are trustworthy, I used a multimethod approach to triangulate the data. I used five methods for data collection: questionnaire (survey), records and documents analyses (policy letters/directives and operating procedures), interviews (recorded), focus groups (recorded), and observation (field notes). First, I afforded to 10 interviewees the opportunity to review, clarify, and amend their statements and my

interpretations/conceptual categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Second, I verified individual self-reports with educational records in order to validate self-reports of education levels, time-in-service, and type-of-unit assignment. Third, I compared the installation's stated educational opportunities and services with actual course offerings and counseling sessions. In addition to this determination of trustworthiness of the data, a complete discussion about how data reliability and validity concerns were addressed was presented in chapter 3.

Conclusion

The chapter began with an elaboration of the answers to this study's four research questions. This was followed by a summary of the research project's key findings. The discussion was followed by a review of the study's assumptions, how the data corroborated or disconfirmed those assumptions, and how the issue of data reliability and trustworthiness was addressed. Based on the study's findings, recommendations were presented for consideration by Army leaders, education, and career transition counselors that could have a positive impact on this group's ability to participate in postsecondary educational opportunities. As the data indicate, not all soldiers desire to participate in higher education. Nevertheless, adult learners who were interviewed for this study all expressed an interest in some type of learning activity. Two factors which affect both participants and nonparticipants' abilities to engage in learning opportunities are the environment and the availability of informational resources.

Individuals' motivational orientations direct their perceptions of barriers and obstacles to college participation. For example, while the data from soldiers' categorized as participants indicate that they are more apt to overcome barriers to

college participation when supportive supervisors are present, nonparticipants were more inclined to enroll in learning opportunities when the subject matter was of interest or to learn a specific skill. At Fort Military, there was not a consistent or coherent philosophy for participation in off-duty education programs across commands. Soldiers were beholden to the organizational culture and the values of the leaders of the unit to which they were assigned. The Army's leadership can improve the current state of postsecondary educational opportunities for participants by the articulation and enforcement of Department of Defense educational policies and directives already in place. At the same time, education and transition counselors can improve the learning opportunities for nonparticipants by identifying soldiers' unique learning needs and directing them to the types of nontraditional programs available at Fort Military and Army-wide.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Consent to Participate
Fort [Military] Command Education Survey

Senior Noncommissioned Officers' Participation
in Postsecondary Educational Opportunities

You are asked to participate in this research study sponsored by the Fort [Military], [State] Educational Services (Ms. Spohn) and conducted by SFC Clinton M. Covert and Dr. William G. Tierney, Ph.D., from the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis at the University of Southern California. You were randomly selected as a possible participant in this study because of your current classification as senior noncommissioned officer with over fifteen years of service. A total of 100 participants will be selected from the different commands located at Fort [Military]. The data collected will primarily be used to meet the requirements of SFC Clinton M. Covert's dissertation research.

Statement of Purpose:
This study pertains to the analysis of factors that either facilitate or inhibit the participation of senior noncommissioned officers in college education programs. Although much information is available regarding participation patterns of non-traditional students such as yourself, little research has been conducted that specifically addresses the unique issues related to senior Army enlisted soldiers.

Procedures:
If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

1. Allow us to gather additional education-related information from your personnel and education record.

2. If selected, spend approximately one hour of duty time participating in a focus group discussion with SFC Covert.

3. If selected, spend approximately forty-five minutes of duty time participating in an interview with SFC Covert.

4. Answer questions about things that make participation in college education programs either difficult or easy.

5. Be available for any follow-up questions via telephone, e-mail, or in person (time commitment not to exceed ½ hour).

Potential Risks and Discomforts:
There are no foreseeable risks, discomforts or inconveniences associated with this study, other than the time necessary to complete the focus groups and/or interviews.

Potential Benefits:
Your participation in this study will help current and future soldiers by assisting the Command in developing a better understanding of your needs as they relate to participation in college-oriented education programs.

Payment for Participation:
You will not receive any payment for your participation in this study.

Confidentiality:
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission as required by law. When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity. If videos or audiotape recordings of you are used during data collection, they will be destroyed upon completion of the research. In addition, any transcripts derived thereof will not be traceable to you.

Participation and Withdrawal:
You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

Identification of Investigators:
If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please feel free to contact us:

SFC Clinton M. Covert
[address]
Fort [Military]
(xxx) xxx-xxxx

William G. Tierney
University of Southern California
Waite Phillips Hall, Rm. 701C
Los Angeles, CA 90089-0031
(213) 740-7218

Ms. Spohn (Command Sponsor)
[X] Education Center
Fort [Military]

Rights of Research Subjects:
You may withdraw consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving legal claims, rights, or remedies because of your participation in this study. If you have any questions regarding your rights contact Legal Assistance Office of the Staff Judge Advocate at (520) 533-2479.

Signature of Participant:
I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from participation at any time. I have received a copy of this form.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature of Participant	Date

APPENDIX B

EDUCATION SURVEY

Fort [Military] Command Education Survey

Privacy Act Disclosure

Authority: DoD Instruction 100.13

Principle Purposes: The purpose for soliciting this information is to provide the command with information regarding factors that influence Army soldiers' participation in postsecondary education and their use of Army educational benefits available to them.

Routine Uses: Any information you provide is disclosable to members of the Department of Defense who have a need for the information in the performance of their duties. No information you provide will be forwarded outside the Department of Defense in any manner identifiable to you.

Disclosure Voluntary: Providing the information is voluntary. There will be no adverse effect on you for not furnishing the information other than that your command will not be able to make informed decisions about how best to provide educational benefits to soldiers in your unit.

Last Name _____ First Name _____ MI _____ Social Security Number _____ - _____ - _____

Rank _____ DOB (MMYY) _____ Gender (M or F) _____ Marital Status _____ Time-in-Service _____

# of Dependents _____ Arrived at Fort [Military] (MMYY) _____ GI Bill (Y-N) _____

MOS _____ Days Deployed Last Year _____ Unit of Assignment _____ Unit Phone # _____

Your Current Education Level (Circle One)

< High School Diploma	High School Diploma	GED
Up to 1 year of College	1-2 years of college (no degree)	
2-year degree	3-4 years of college (no degree)	
4 year degree	> 4 years of college	

Parents' Highest Education Level (Please Circle One for Each Parent-Place "F" by Father and "M" by Mother)

< High School Diploma	High School Diploma	GED
Up to 1 year of College	1-2 years of college (no degree)	
2-year degree	3-4 years of college (no degree)	
4 year degree	> 4 years of college	

Have you taken any college courses in the last 2 years? Yes No (Please circle One)

If yes, how many classes have you taken? _____ ___

What are some of your reasons for taking college courses?

(Please write your response on the back)

In your own words, what difficulties do you experience in taking classes or trying to take classes?

(Please write your response on the back)

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW: PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

Interview – Participant Questionnaire

Senior Noncommissioned Officers' Participation in Postsecondary Educational Opportunities

I am trying to understand the motivational orientations of senior noncommissioned officers' participation in postsecondary educational opportunities. In addition, I am trying to understand what barriers or deterrents to participation are present so that education service providers, counselors, and the Army's leadership can improve the climate for enlisted soldiers participating in college as they near a career transition. Let me begin with some broad questions.

I. Individual History

1. How long have you been stationed here?
2. What type of college degree/s do you have and are currently pursuing?
3. Demographic Data (MOS, race, age, gender, married/single/kids, and time-in-service).

II. Parents History (Aspects of first-generation students)

1. What are your parents' highest levels of education?
2. Growing up, what was their perspective or outlook toward college?
3. Today, what is their perspective toward higher education?
4. Parents' Demographic data (occupation, race, age, gender, married/single).

III. Present (Motivation/Barriers/Life Transitions)

1. How would you describe your college-going experience throughout your career? (From Army post to post)
2. Describe your experience at the education center here at Fort [Military] when you in processed.
3. What was your perspective toward higher education before entering the Army?
4. Today, what is your view/perspective toward higher education?
5. What do you plan to do (career wise) five years from now?
6. Why are you pursuing a bachelor degree?
7. How much of a consideration is your upcoming retirement and career transition in you deciding to take college courses?
8. Who or what has had a positive affect on your ability to go to school?
9. Who or what has discouraged you from taking college classes.

IV. Policy

1. If you were invited to speak to the post's commanding general as a representative of senior noncommissioned officers to speak to the Army leadership about going to college, what would you tell the committee that the Army could do to enhance its education services and opportunities for participation?

2. Take a moment to reflect on the things we talked about today and is there anything you would like to add?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW: NONPARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

Interview – Non-Participant Questionnaire

Senior Noncommissioned Officers' Participation in Postsecondary Educational Opportunities

I am trying to understand the motivational orientations of senior noncommissioned officers' participation in postsecondary educational opportunities. In addition, I am trying to understand what barriers or deterrents to participation are present so that education service providers, counselors, and the Army's leadership can improve the climate for enlisted soldiers participating in college as they near a career transition. Let me begin with some broad questions.

I. Individual History

1. How long have you been stationed here?
2. What type of college degree/s or semester hours do you have?
3. Demographic Data (MOS, race, age, gender, married/single/kids, and time-in-service.

II. Parents History (Aspects of first-generation students)

1. What are your parents' highest levels of education?
2. Growing up, what was their perspective or outlook toward college?
3. Today, what is their perspective toward higher education?
4. Parents' Demographic data (occupation, race, age, married/single).

III. Present (Motivation/Barriers/Life Transitions)

1. How would you describe your college-going experience throughout your career? (From Army post to post)
2. Describe your experience at the education center here at Fort [Military] when you in-processed.
3. Presently, what is your view/perspective toward higher education?
4. What do you see yourself doing (career wise) five years from now?
5. What are some of the main reasons you have taken not taken any college courses during the past five years?
6. Under what circumstances do you see yourself taking college courses?
7. Who or what has had a positive affect on your ability to go to school?
8. Who or what has discouraged you from taking college classes.

IV. Policy

1. If you were invited to speak to the post's commanding general as a representative of senior noncommissioned officers about going to college, what would you tell him or her that could be done to make it easier for you to take classes?

2. Take a moment to reflect on the things we talked about today and is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP: PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

Focus Group – Participant Questionnaire

Senior Noncommissioned Officers' Participation
in Postsecondary Educational Opportunities

I am trying to understand the motivational orientations of senior noncommissioned officers' participation in postsecondary educational opportunities. In addition, I am trying to understand what barriers or deterrents to participation are present so that education service providers, counselors, and the Army's leadership can improve the climate for enlisted soldiers participating in college as they near a career transition. Let me begin with some broad questions.

I. Motivation

1. What were your reasons for taking your first college course?
2. What factor plays the biggest role in you taking college courses now? explain

II. Barriers/Deterrents

1. Who or What has been the biggest obstacle for you to overcome in order to take college courses? Explain

III. Policy

1. If you were invited to speak to the post's commanding general as a representative of senior noncommissioned officers to speak about going to college, what would you tell him or her that the Army could do to enhance its education services and opportunities for you to participate?

2. Take a moment to reflect on the things we talked about today and is there anything any of you would like to add?

APPENDIX F

FOCUS GROUP: NONPARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

Focus Group – Non-Participant Questionnaire

Senior Noncommissioned Officers' Participation
in Postsecondary Educational Opportunities

I am trying to understand the motivational orientations of senior noncommissioned officers' participation in postsecondary educational opportunities. In addition, I am trying to understand what barriers or deterrents to participation are present so that education service providers, counselors, and the Army's leadership can improve the climate for enlisted soldiers participating in college as they near a career transition. Let me begin with some broad questions.

I. Motivation/Life Transitions

1. What do you see yourself doing after retiring from the Army?
2. If the leadership here at Fort [Military] could implement policies and programs that would compel you to enroll in a college course, what would they be?

II. Barriers/Deterrents

1. What would you say is the one thing that prevents you from going to college? Explain

III. Policy

1. If you were invited to speak to the post's commanding general as a representative of senior noncommissioned officers to speak to the Army leadership about going to college, what would you tell the committee that the Army could do to enhance its education services and opportunities for you to participate?

2. Take a moment to reflect on the things we talked about today and is there anything any of you would like to add?

APPENDIX G

PROTOCOL WORKSHEET

Senior Noncommissioned Officers' Participation in Postsecondary Educational Opportunities Protocol

Interviewee/Observation_____Date_____

Title/Position/Location_____ Yrs._____ Sex _____M _____

Institution/Center_____

I. Key Topics Discussed/Observed

II. Quotable Quotes

III. Questions/Observations That Need Further Investigation/Corroboration

IV. Tentative Conclusions

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